

Volume 22 Number 4 \$5.50 A magazine about issues of art and culture

# FUSE

MAGAZINE

## INUIT VIDEO: STRUGGLES FOR AUTONOMY BY MICHAEL ROBERT EVANS



**EARL MILLER ON FEAR OF REPLICATED INTELLIGENCE**

**ALBERTO GOMEZ AND SPACES FOR LATINO ART**

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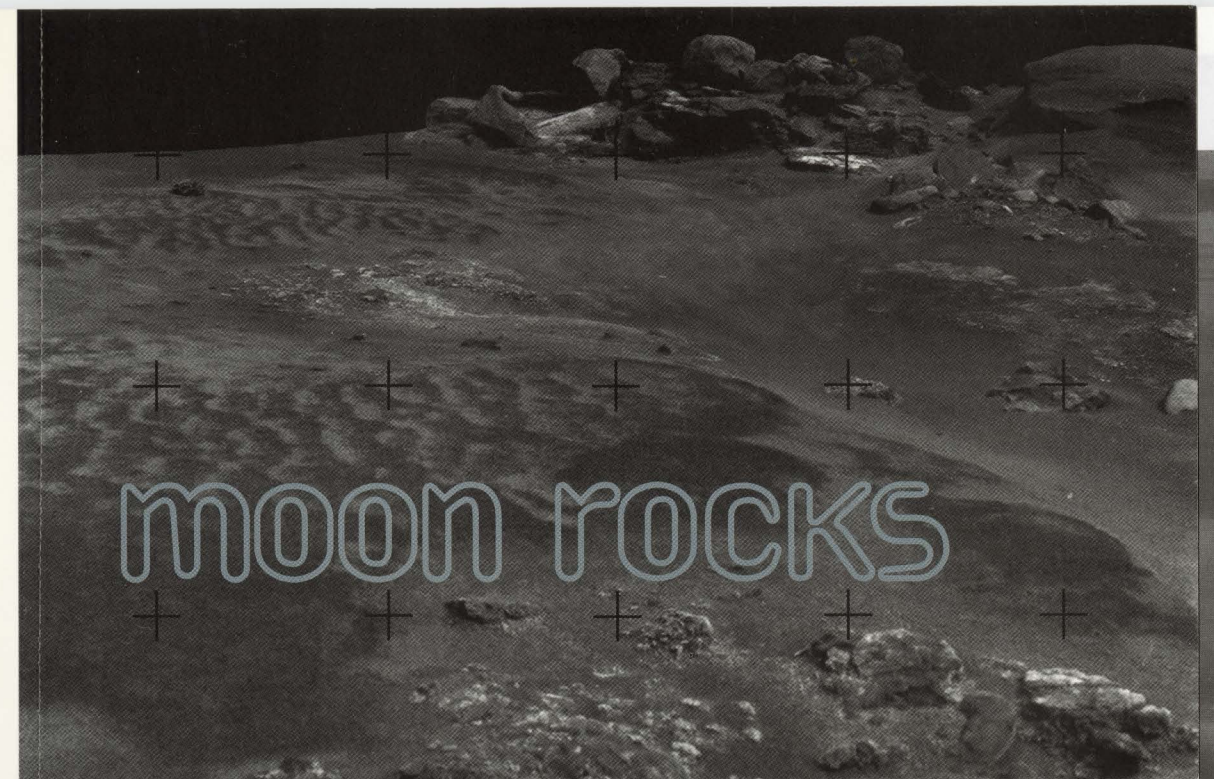
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See the review of Paul Lamothe's postcard project on page 39 of this issue.



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QUEER THEORY AND THE SUBJECT OF



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### Transmen and FTMs

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means to be a female-bodied transperson.

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Heterosexuality

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of queer theory to humanize the world,  
making it "queerer than ever."

"[Makes] sexuality visible, and hence [makes]  
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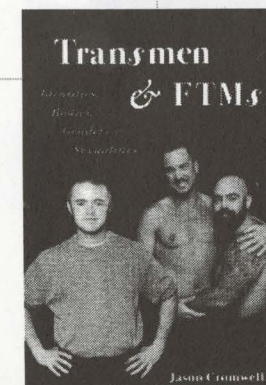
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QUEER THEORY AND THE SUBJECT OF  
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VOLUME 22 NUMBER 4 JANUARY 2000

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FUSE is published four times a year by Artons Cultural Affairs Society and Publishing Inc., a non-profit artist's organization. Our offices are located at 401 Richmond Street West, suite 454, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V 3A8. E-mail: fuse@interlog.com, website: www.fusemagazine.org, tel: (416) 340-8026, fax: (416) 340-0494. All newsstand inquiries should be sent to this address. Publication mail registration No. 8623.

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ISSN 0838-603X

FUSE is indexed in the Alternative Press Index and is distributed by, and a member of, the Canadian Magazine Publisher's Association, 130 Spadina Ave., Suite 202, Toronto, Ontario M5V 2L4, tel: (416) 504-0274, fax: (416) 504-0437. FUSE is a member of the Independent Press Association, San Francisco. FUSE acknowledges financial assistance from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Cultural Human Resources Council, Human Resources Development Canada and the Toronto Arts Council, in addition to the many hours of volunteer and partially paid labour that are provided by everyone listed on our masthead.

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On set with Igloolik Isuma Productions (1998).  
Photo: Marie-Hélène Cousineau.



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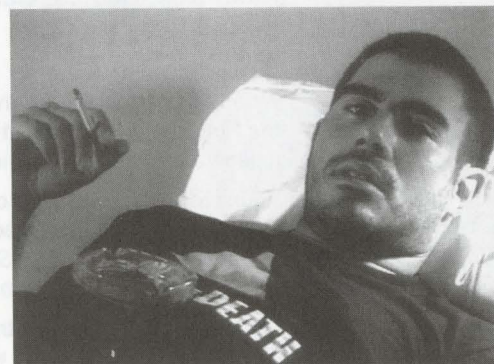
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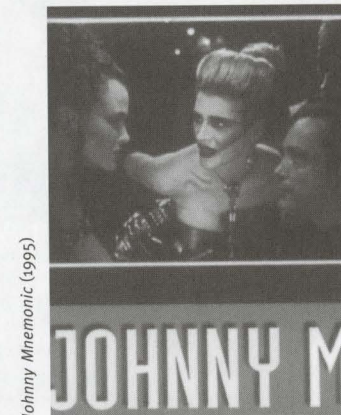
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Gregg Bordowitz, *Fast Trip, Long Drop*, 1993, 54 min.  
Stills courtesy of the artist.  
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Cover image: production still from Igloolik Isuma Productions' *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, spring 1998, Igloolik, Nunavut.

The late Paul Apak, writer, Zacharias Kunuk, director, and June Kunuk on the set of *Atanarjuat*, spring 1998.

Photo: Marie-Hélène Cousineau, [www.isuma.ca](http://www.isuma.ca)

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Aerial photo from *Room for Walking*, Daniel Joliffe, 1999, interactive installation.  
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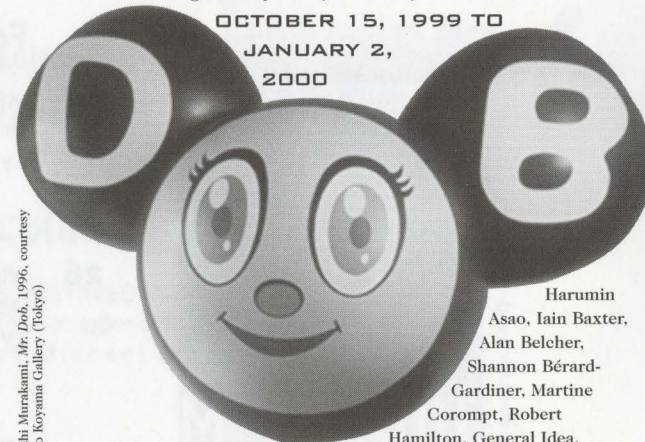
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Takashi Murakami, Mr. Do, 1996, courtesy  
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Kazuhiko Hachiya, Mike Kelley, Anda Kubis, Jefferson Little, Kaoru  
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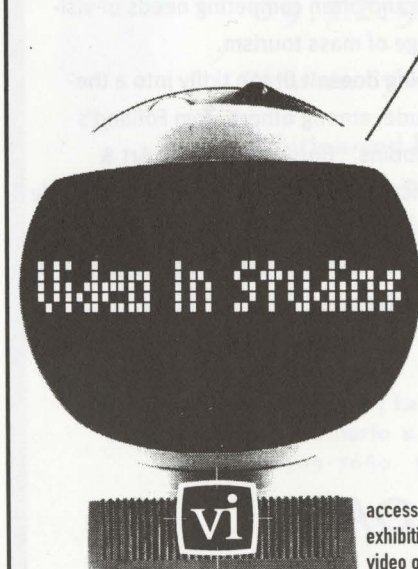
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## editorial

The FUSE editorial board has undergone a number of changes in recent months. The board is responsible for the coordination of each issue of FUSE, from conceptualization through to the solicitation of writing, review of unsolicited manuscripts and editing of articles. We also plan issue launches, community events such as panel discussions, sit on committees, adjudicate Writers' Reserve grants, review finances and try to keep abreast of what's happening in the arts community, locally, nationally and beyond. In this issue, we take the time to acknowledge the immeasurable contributions of those who have so graciously given their time and energy to build and sustain FUSE. We count on this type of commitment for our very survival.

FUSE magazine will greatly miss the contributions of Richard Fung and Millie Chen. Richard brought a widely respected and eminently reasonable voice to board meetings, one that could focus even the most raucous argument into a productive discussion. He most recently co-edited FUSE's Caribana and Carnival issue (vol. 22, no. 1) and spearheaded its provocative launch party and panel discussion. As a writer, Richard has been at the centre of FUSE's evolving debates around identity politics and will, he assures us, continue to send editorial contributions our way.

Millie Chen, whom you likely know as a successful artist, has left FUSE to take a teaching position. We will miss her broad knowledge of visual art and particularly her intimate connection with the art community. Meanwhile, York University professor and writer Rinaldo Walcott has left the editorial board, but continues his association with FUSE as a contributing editor.

Nell Tenhaaf, whose interest in new media technologies has influenced FUSE's content and direction, has also left the editorial board, but continues to assist FUSE in the area of website development. We extend our sincere best wishes to all in their new endeavours and hope that they will continue to direct their brilliance in FUSE's direction whenever they can.

Difficult as it is to say goodbye to people who have been central to FUSE's work and to manage the transition of personalities and interests, it's exciting to welcome a number of new people to FUSE's editorial board and to watch the new dynamics and directions that unfold. We are very happy to have

Meera Sethi and Richard Almonte join us. Meera is working toward an MA in Interdisciplinary Studies at York University, focusing on cultural and visual theory. Her ambitions for FUSE are, as she puts it, "to see the magazine continue to provide a forum for exciting, boundary-pushing, cross-disciplinary exchange between artists, activists, academics and cultural producers and to engage itself critically and creatively with an even wider range of issues, ideas and cultural movements."

Richard Almonte is currently a publicity coordinator at the Literary Press Group of Canada while working part time on his Ph.D. in English at McMaster University, with a specialization in early Black literature. His edition of Mary Shadd's *A Plea For Emigration* was published by the Mercury Press in 1998. His input will no doubt help FUSE to expand our literary coverage. We hope that this influx of new people and ideas refreshes, strengthens and contributes to the ongoing vitality of FUSE.

The current issue of FUSE closes out the century with a site-specific theme. Margot Francis shows us how Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's Lesbian National Parks and Services Project (which made a partial appearance as an artists' project in vol. 21, no. 3) unsettles the Canadian tourist site par excellence—Banff National Park—and problematizes the figure of the kindly, helpful park ranger. Michael Robert Evans' "Sometimes in Anger: The Struggles of Inuit Video," takes us to the Arctic in response to Laura U. Marks' article "Inuit Auteurs and Arctic Airwaves: Questions of Southern Reception" (vol. 21, no. 4).

Artist Paul Lamothe's Sudbury postcards take us home with him to a place that may be Sudbury, but not quite as we're used to it, and not quite of this earth. They are this issue's artist's project—send them to someone you love—or someone who loves Sudbury! On a most serious note, Kenneth Hayes interviews architect Robert Jan van Pelt, discussing how to accommodate the diverse and often competing needs of visitors to Auschwitz in the age of mass tourism.

And just so everything doesn't fit too tidily into a thematic framework, we include, among others: Tom Folland's feisty response to Gary Kibbins' "Bored Bedmates: Art & Criticism, Political vs. Critical" (vol. 22, no. 2), which sees a role for the political to play in art in its own undoing; Rozena Maart glorying in the spiritual in art; and Earl Miller's interrogation of our fears of replicated intelligence.

— the FUSE Editorial Board

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letters

Dear Editor:

I am writing in response to the FUSE issue on funding the arts (FUSE 22, no. 3, September 1999).

Barbara Godard's piece dealing specifically with the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) ("Privatizing the Public: Notes from the Ontario Culture Wars"), was curiously out of date. It focused on events more than a year old and segued into the issues around OAC's support to magazines without mentioning the change in leadership. Shortly after I arrived, the board reaffirmed its support to the literary sector and these programs have all been reinstated.

Since I was named executive director at the end of April 1999, I have been committed to re-energizing this organization. We have made real efforts to improve our availability to the people we serve by moving staff onto one floor and opening up the reception area. I am pleased to have had the opportunity to spend evenings and days meeting with representatives of arts organizations and individual artists. My number one priority is making sure that OAC's resources support the arts in the best possible way.

I also wish to state categorically that neither the OAC's arm's-length agency status nor its commitment to peer assessment have changed.

Donna Scott  
Executive Director, Ontario Arts Council

Response from Barbara Godard:

*Ms Scott comments in her letter that my article was "curiously out of date" since it focused on "events more than a year old" and did not note the change in executive directorship that took place in May 1999.*

*In reply, I should like to draw attention to the fact that my article was based on an historical analysis and comparison of definitions of culture articulated by the Ontario Arts Council and their policy implications for funding the arts in Ontario from 1963 to 1998. In particular, I traced the changing connotations of "balance" as this term rationalized and reconfigured state intervention in cultural production. Many changes have occurred during this period. Undoubtedly, there will be yet further mutations in view of the changes at the Ontario Arts Council with the replacement in 1999 of both the executive director and the chairman of the board. As yet, it is*

*too early in Ms Scott's leadership to carry out the kind of discourse and policy analysis I did of the OAC's previous thirty-five years. Over this period, I note, there has been a general trend in Ontario from a participatory model to a market model of the arts.*

Dear Editor:

It is often said that criticism from one's friends is considerably more hurtful than that from one's enemies, and Clive Robertson's lengthy critique of the Canada Council for the Arts ("Custody Battles: Changing the Rules at the Canada Council," FUSE 22, no. 3) is no exception. No one could agree more with Mr. Robertson that freedom from political interference, the principle of peer assessment and the administration of arts councils by arts professionals are the cornerstones of an effective arts funding agency. But his contention that we at the Council have somehow compromised those principles is so rooted in inaccuracies that it gives one pause to wonder when FUSE got into the business of publishing fiction.

To cite a few examples:

- Mr. Robertson's statement that "only 20–30 percent of the monies that the Canada Council distributes are strictly decided by peer jury" is completely and utterly untrue. In fact, approximately 90 percent of all Canada Council grants and prizes are awarded by peer-assessment committees. The exceptions relate principally to travel grants, which for purposes of expediency and cost are determined by juries of Council staff.
- His repeated accusations that the Council has somehow compromised its arm's-length status ("bonding with the politics

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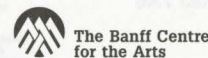
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of the moment") has no basis in fact. If anything, we have actively and vociferously guarded our independence, both in defence of jury decisions and in our efforts to act as advocates for artists and arts organizations in what Mr. Robertson correctly identifies as an often-hostile political environment.

• His inference that the administrative cuts in the mid-1990s were somehow part of a draconian ploy to cut off consultation with the arts community, fire senior arts professionals and please our political masters is just plain wrong. Faced with a reduction in our total Parliamentary allocation (like all federally funded agencies at that time), the Council had the difficult choice of either cutting administration or reducing support for artists and arts organizations. The Council's decision was to keep the grants budget intact; would Mr. Robertson have wanted us to act otherwise?

Rather than dwell on the sins—real or imagined—of the past, Mr. Robertson would do better to take a close look at what the Canada Council is doing right now, and where we see ourselves going in the future. He would discover that we have introduced a range of innovative new programs—headed by senior arts professionals—in direct response to the needs and desires of the arts community. He would also find that we are placing a greater priority on arts advocacy than at any time in our history, are taking positive steps to codify guidelines for peer assessment across the programs of the Council, and are working to ensure a common understanding of the definition and implications of "arms-length" for the benefit of Council staff, the arts community and the government alike.

Shirley L. Thomson

Director, The Canada Council for the Arts

Response from Clive Robertson:

The official "we-are-never-subjects-of-government-policy" versioning of the Canada Council's ongoing histories is to be expected. However, as a scholar, Dr. Thompson knows that there is no intellectual basis for her claim that such official versions of institutional history have the status of "facts" that can sweep all composite community accounts of its policy effects under the rug of "fiction."

Those monies for artists and arts organizations that the Council protected from cuts to its allocations have never provided secure artist incomes and should not be seen as buying unquestioned support for the Canada Council's periodic management and program refits. There are many younger and

older voices in the arts community who (like Hal Jackman) believe that further privatizing the arts would signal some kind of civic/global maturity or legitimacy.

The Canada Council must understand that arts advocacy means much more than publicly spreading the word about its own "good works." To survive fresh political tests on public arts funding, the Council should resist its view of itself as a perfect reflection of the arts community and allocate adequate resources for production communities to undertake arts advocacy for themselves. If the Council truly desires to promote a "common understanding" of its fluid arm's-length relationships, Council management should acknowledge the reality that Parliament and the arts community separately view their relationships with the Canada Council in ways that can be at odds with how the Council publicly idealizes such relationships.

To realize promises of democratic accountability to the arts community requires looking beyond the Council-managed peer-assessment process. As the government of the day appoints the board of public trustees, what is stopping the Canada Council implementing autonomous arts advisory committees elected by the arts community to help improve the politics of accountability necessary for this unusual and important partnership?

## erratum

In the column "When Public Became Private" by Andrew James Paterson (vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 9-12) the title of an exhibition curated by Kym Pruesse was in error. The correct title is: "off\site@toronto" and not "Off/Site."



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## Sometimes in Anger The Struggles of Inuit Video

by Michael Robert Evans

In Igloolik, a small Inuit settlement north of the Arctic Circle, Christmas was celebrated in familiar ways last year. The community highlight was the Christmas festival, held in the elementary school gym, that featured cute children acting out the coming of the Wise Men, the gallant leadership of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and the melting and subsequent resurrection of Frosty the Snowman.

At the end of the festivities, some adults took the floor. Clad in caribou garments, they acted out a different kind of story: scenes from an ancient Inuit legend about a young man named Atanarjuat. The young man flees from attackers, dashes across the ocean ice, recovers in seclusion and returns to Igloolik to put an end to the evil that has shattered the community. The legend is being converted into a movie by Igloolik Isuma Productions, an independent video company that plans to make *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* the world's first Inuit-produced feature-length movie.

*Atanarjuat* represents just one front for Isuma in a long-odds battle against the colonialism that continues to clutch its way northward from Ottawa. To understand the conflict, it is important to understand how video came to the Canadian Arctic. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, television programming from the United States began to swell in both number of programs and strength of signal. Ozzie and Harriet, Ward and June Cleaver, and other quintessentially American families beamed out their interpretations of modern life to living rooms


throughout the country. Viewers were treated to frequent baths in "truth, justice, and the American Way," and the All-American Boy leapt from radio to the television airwaves.

But Americans weren't the only ones watching. Across the border to the north, Canadians received and enjoyed these programs as well. Despite the enjoyment, however, some Canadians became concerned about the fare available through television. Too much television programming, it was argued, showed not a Canadian world but an American one. The programs were about Americans. The programs were made by Americans. The programs presented American perspectives, American tastes, American worldviews. Canadian culture, said the critics, would wither in the face of this media barrage from the South.

So steps were taken to counter the assault with programming that represented Canadian attitudes and interests. Fighting fire with fire, the Canadian government supported and mandated television programming that had significant levels of "Canadian content." If the American presence on the airwaves is diluted with material conspicuously by and about Canadians, it was thought, then television will have a less devastating impact on Canadian culture—and might even enhance it.

As television programming in southern Canada was beginning to blossom, the Anik-A satellite, launched in 1972, gave seventeen communities in the Arctic access to radio, telephone, and television—especially the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. By 1975, most Northern communities received television broadcasts that were entirely in English. But as Canadian programming invaded the North, communities in the Arctic developed the same concerns that their southern counterparts had developed in response to the American invasion.

The encroachment of Canadian programming into Northern communities was seen as a threat to the



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local cultures, and Northern leaders reacted in familiar fashion. They argued for support for Northern programming that would reflect the cultures of the Arctic—in opposition to the material being beamed up from the south.

While the challenge of bringing television to the Arctic was being addressed, videomaking began to take hold as well. In Igloolik, a settlement of twelve hundred people in what is now the Nunavut territory, Zacharias Kunuk was among the first to get a video camera, for example, and he began to experiment with its use several years before the settlement voted to admit television into its homes.

After the success of the famous Inukshuk Project, which used part of the broadcast capabilities of the newly launched Anik-B satellite to give six Northern communities access to an interactive communications project, the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) was formed. As part of the shift from the Inukshuk Project to the IBC, the amount of weekly air time was reduced and the interactive nature of the communication system was eliminated—but as of 1981, the Inuit were on the air.

### THE SQUEEZE OF HEGEMONY

It is tempting, when watching something new and exciting develop along a fresh frontier, to hope for—and even assume—a clean slate. But the last true *tabula rasa* vanished shortly after the Big Bang, and every new beginning brings with it forms, structures and assumptions from the past. For an example of this effect, look no further than the nascent government of the new Nunavut territory. The creation of Nunavut offered an opportunity for the people in that region to reinvent some basic forms of government—to shape their government to suit their worldview, rather than merely replicating the models that came before. And while the Nunavut government might yet evolve into something distinct from other Canadian examples, at the outset at least it is very much like the Government of the Northwest Territories it is replacing. Yes, it has some new and fundamentally valuable departments; the Department of Culture, Language, Elders, and Youth, for example, promises to give Nunavut a cultural dimension lacking in many regional governments. Yes, the government building in Iqaluit is supposed to resemble a giant igloo, a

nod to the traditional Inuit way of life. But the Nunavut government's overall structure—its basic form—has the look and feel of other territorial and provincial governments throughout Canada. The one attempt to give the government a decidedly innovative flair, a move that would have captured the attention of the world, was defeated. It was the effort to mandate “gender parity” in the legislative assembly, requiring equal numbers of male and female members—but a region-wide vote on the issue failed. The old models held sway.

The same kind of hegemony exerts its influence over video in the Arctic. When the IBC was formed, its leaders naturally enough looked around for ways to learn about video production. Video was already well-established in the south, of course, so the solution was no more complicated than finding experienced videographers in the south and getting them to teach the new generation of Inuit producers.

The problem with this approach, however, is that it dodged an opportunity. With the advent of video in the Arctic—just as with the advent of the Nunavut government in the Arctic—an opportunity was present to do something new. Something that not only looked different, but that *was* different in its very structures, assumptions and basic forms. And not just difference for the sake of difference, which merely leads to fashion fads that suffocate under their own silliness, but difference because the culture is different. Video gave the Inuit a chance to create video in an Inuit way—but that opportunity was not seized because the IBC took a different path. This path, which led toward the production of excellent videos, required the new videomakers in the North to figure out what an excellent video looked like—and for that, they turned to people who had years of experience and piles of awards to their credit. They turned to videographers in the south.

The IBC is not to be lambasted for this decision. The conflict over Inuit video is not about personal tiffs or a lack of chemistry between individuals. It is, however, about differing systems of thought and approach. Videography, like any mode of cultural expression, can be seen as both a product and a process. As a product, videos can record, disseminate, maintain, revive, and reclaim aspects of a culture that might otherwise be lost. And that is precisely the IBC mandate.

According to the IBC website (<http://www.tvnc.ca/Members/ibc.html>), the corporation pursues the following goals:

- providing a forum and vehicle by which Inuit can exercise their right to freedom of expression;
- to interpret local, national and international issues and events to Inuit in the context of their own understanding;
- to strengthen and enrich the cultural and social fabric of Inuit;
- to contribute to the exchange of cultural and regional information and entertainment;
- to train and employ Inuit in the planning, production and distribution of their own television programs;
- to be a symbol of Inuit determination to take their own place as active participants in the Canadian nation; and
- to provide a vehicle for the free exchange of ideas toward the objective of Inuit cultural survival.

These are laudable goals, and the IBC, struggling mightily under the burden of horrific budget cuts inflicted by the federal government, does its best to fulfill them.

But these goals reflect an appreciation of video as product, as a means to capture something of culture and show it to others. But video also is a process, a means of going about the activity of making a program. It is in this area that the hegemony of southern video crept in. Southern ways of going about the creation of videos became the norm as southern trainers showed new producers how to do their jobs.

But southern approaches didn't creep in everywhere. While Igloolik was rejecting television in the 1970s because of the cultural erosion it tends to cause, Zacharias Kunuk was carving soapstone and watching the movies that were shown in town. In 1981, he saw a video camera for the first time—and realized that with that tool, he would have the ability to make his own movies. It is an oft-told tale: He made several carvings, flew down to Montreal, and sold them for cash. He then took the cash up the street to a camera store and bought a video outfit of his own, including a camera, a vcr and a television set. The clerk behind the counter showed him how to work the equipment, and Kunuk flew back to Igloolik and set it up in his living room. He made videos that showed his family doing various

things around the house and on the land, and he played the tapes at night on his new setup. He knew he was onto something powerful when he saw neighborhood children pressing their faces against his windows, watching the videos while standing outside in the cold.

So Kunuk managed to get involved in video without the shaping influence of southern trainers. He developed his own style of videography, a style he feels reflects an Inuit worldview, and he took that style to the IBC when it opened a production center in Igloolik.

But the southern influences on the videomaking process at the IBC—and the Ottawa-based control of the entire corporation—led him to join with Paul Apak, Paulossie Qulitalik and Norman Cohn to form Igloolik Isuma Productions in the late 1980s. Eventually, Kunuk left the IBC to work at Isuma full-time. “We were proud to get into television. The IBC was important to us. But it was only a name; it was not the same underneath. So we went our way,” Kunuk said. Isuma places itself in opposition to the IBC because the Isuma producers feel that the IBC represents standard-issue colonial forces—the same forces that relocated the Inuit into permanent settlements and herded Inuit children into English-only boarding schools—only the IBC's version has a native face. But the IBC is not the only target of Isuma's challenge. The outfit also is taking on Ottawa itself; “outside” filmmakers such as Robert Flaherty and Asen Balikci, who offer the world non-Inuit interpretations of the Inuit and their lives in the North; and even other Inuit groups who fail, in Isuma's estimation, to resist the hegemonic forces attempting to shape the Inuit world from afar. And Isuma aims to resist it through process as well as product.

“Our work is specifically designed to ask fundamental, challenging questions about media politics and how things are made,” Cohn said. “What the process reflects in the videos themselves. And the impacts on viewers. The way videos are made—the politics of their process—is visible on the screen. It becomes part of the product itself.”

At the core of these battles lies the right of a people to tell their own story in their own way; as Kunuk put it, “We are in the best position to tell our own stories.” Other people have the right to tell



Opposite and above: production stills from Igloolik Isuma Productions' *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*. Photos by Marie-Hélène Cousineau, 1998.



whatever stories they choose, of course, but people's stories by and about themselves mustn't get lost in the mix.

## JOURNALISTIC HABIT

The conflicts surrounding Inuit video are complex and multi-dimensional; such is the nature of hegemony. The situation is misunderstood in the south—in the very locus of the domination that Isuma seeks to challenge—largely because the nature of journalistic inquiry has led to its distortion. I have been a journalist for several decades now, and I recently joined the journalism faculty at a major university in the United States. Journalism, unfortunately, suffers from the same kinds of hegemonic stresses as does every other human enterprise. Journalism these days—at least, what most southerners/Westerners would consider *good* journalism—calls for certain approaches to information-gathering, fact-reporting and the quixotic but necessary pursuit of objectivity. Among these approaches is the need to find an interviewee. Especially when reporting on a tangled and difficult issue, reporters have been taught to seek out someone involved in the situation who can explain it to people, someone who can put a human face and a concrete reality onto an otherwise cerebral and intangible concern. So reporters ask around, searching for an articulate and ideally colorful individual who is willing to speak into a microphone. Once that individual is found, a spokesperson—and hence a leader—is born.

Journalists also strive to make things clear—and in so doing, they often make things simple. Where subtle distinctions and multiple layers threaten to muddy an issue, the journalist will try to carve out camps and factions and territories, each with its own spokesperson/leader. Complexity abounds in the real world, but simplicity is the king of the mass media.

It is through this drive for clarity and emphasis on a spokesperson that movements are accorded simple messages and potent generals—precisely what has happened with regard to Arctic video.

Zacharias Kunuk has been positioned at the head of the attack, and the struggle has been portrayed as a

battle between him and the people who run the IBC. These misperceptions are not the fault of the people at Isuma—they are the fault of journalists who fall prey to their own habits. I spent nine months—from July 1998 to April 1999—in Igloolik, researching a Ph.D. dissertation on Inuit video, and the situation I found there exposes the fallacies of the media's standard interpretation. The issue is more complex, more subtly shaded and more important than a mere showdown on the dusty streets of Igloolik. And it is more involved than one person's disappointment with the system. Igloolik Isuma is a loose consortium of videographers and others—costumers, scriptwriters and so on—who make the creation of videos possible. Some at Isuma came because they believe in the struggle against persistent colonialism. Some came because they like the atmosphere. And some came because they prefer the project-based approach to videomaking—an approach more in keeping with attitudes common in the North—over the short-segment and deadline-driven approach taken by the IBC. But these interests are sufficiently common to bind the group together in a general way, and to allow the group to push for its own approach to the alchemy of converting ideas into videos.

Any discourse about hegemony must take into account its most salient feature: that most rebellions against the dominant system are, in fact, allowed within the structure of the dominant system itself. It is like the difference between provinces squabbling over a Social Union, which is tolerated, and one of them leaving the country altogether, which (perhaps) is not. By its very nature, hegemony positions the dominant system in such a way that those who truly dare swim against its currents are considered troublemakers, egotists or insane.

The trap that this view establishes, however, is the assumption that when something fits a hegemonic prescription, it is necessarily the result of hegemonic forces. In the case of Isuma, the story of Kunuk selling carvings to buy a camera serves as an example. Does the story position Kunuk as an independent thinker, doing what he can to break out of the system imposed from outside? Or is he some lunatic out to attract attention to himself? The southern view is that Kunuk is a leader who stands before his army, wielding video gear in a war against the colonial system. But when Kunuk bought the camera and vcr equipment, the IBC had yet to arrive in Igloolik. He was not acting in a rebellious capacity against a perceived Evil Empire.

He was acting as an artist who wanted to find new modes of expression. It was only later, after working through steady promotions at the IBC, that Kunuk began to develop his sense that something was wrong. In the beginning, his camera was not a weapon. It was a camera. It became a weapon only when Kunuk found a weapon necessary. And he is not standing in front of his army; rather, he is part of a group of people who share his views and his dreams. Sometimes one person leads a charge, sometimes another. But structures like these thwart journalistic endeavors to fit reality into the logic of flow charts—and so, the picture is distorted when reported in the south. It is too easy to think of Kunuk and Isuma as fighting against a colonial system based in Ottawa. That fight is real, but it is not the only effort Isuma is making. Isuma also makes videos to preserve traditional Inuit knowledge, reinforce respect for elders and ancestors, and remind people in today's world that knowledge has value. "That's why I make videos," Kunuk said, "to talk about the old things—maybe just to really see it, how it went. There's a lot of things that we still just know, that have to be recorded. The danger of floe edge—people sometimes die, drift off. They try to get back on the safe ice—how to do it? We have to record it on video. If ice broke off, and I am drifting out to sea, how do I survive? The elders knew how to do it. We should record it."

## ANTIDOTE

If the notion of hegemony is taken to its fullest extent, it is completely engulfing: no one can escape the dominant order, and those who try are actually serving the dominant order by making people think they have alternatives. In the terms of Inuit video, this hegemony is exerted through funding and broadcast channels. Video, in its early days, was seen as the grassroots antidote to film; film equipment and processing is expensive and elaborate, while video gear was seen as inexpensive, easy to obtain and simple to use. But video is not without its own expenses, and anyone serious about creating quality videos needs money. Cameras, editing equipment and other gear require amounts of cash that force video artists to turn to government-funded granting organizations. And broadcasting the results—the only way to reach a large audience—require access to political channels also dominated by established orders. So video makes groups like Igloolik Isuma possible, but it doesn't make them free.

But increasingly, Isuma is turning its attention to a medium that picks up where video leaves off.

In the spectrum that begins with film and continues through video, the next logical point is the World Wide Web. Isuma has a website ([www.isuma.ca](http://www.isuma.ca)), and this new medium offers the kind of promise that might eventually lead to direct contact between mission-oriented groups—like Isuma—and the audience they hope to reach. Once the web reaches the point at which video can be transmitted adequately—a day perhaps not too far in the future, although current efforts leave much to be desired—then Isuma and similar groups can put their videos on the Web at their own discretion, without requiring the permission of the CBC, or TVNC/APTN or the History Channel.

Meanwhile, much of Igloolik is increasingly busy with the creation of *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, Isuma's most ambitious project to date. The Isuma office, sleepy throughout much of the 1998–99 winter, began to come alive again during the early spring. Kunuk met with Isuma employees and other people from the town to go over the script and make improvements as needed; crowded around a table in a small room off the main office, they chattered and read dialogue and scribbled changes on the script's pages. Meetings were held in the main room to pound numbers against other numbers in an effort to work out the complex formula of funding that would let the project get under way. Kayla Tulugarjuk, an adorable toddler, provided charm and diversion as Micheline Ammaq planned the costuming while other people sketched out the blocking of scenes on paper. Men with strong backs ventured out to one of the taping sites to dig a set out from under the snow. The excitement of *Atanarjuat* is sweeping up the entire town, including some people who, in Isuma's estimation, are "part of the problem." If the movie is successful, people throughout the world will have an opportunity to learn more about the Inuit—thanks to a story told from an Inuit perspective, a video made in an Inuit way. Assuming Isuma can get *Atanarjuat* on the air, it is just such efforts that can, at times, begin to crack the shell of hegemonic control.

*Michael Evans is an assistant professor of journalism at Indiana University. He spent nine months in Igloolik, Nunavut, last year, studying Inuit video for his doctoral dissertation. He expresses his appreciation to the people of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, Igloolik Isuma Productions and the Tariagsuk Video Centre for their help in his research.*

*Angirag (Home), Zacharias Kunuk, 1995, Inuktitut with English or French subtitles, 28.5 min. Distributor: V Tape.*





KEANU REEVES DOLPH LUNDGREN

JOHNNY'S A  
CYBERCOURIER.  
His job bytes.

JOHNNY MNEMONIC  
THE FUTURE'S MOST WANTED FUGITIVE.

## The Fear of Replicated Intelligence

# Memory Loss

by Earl Miller

The lamentable but surprisingly significant film, *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), based on the short story of the same name by William Gibson, directed by the aging '80s art "star," Robert Longo, and appropriately starring Keanu Reeves as a man who loses part of his brain, concerns the adventures of a digital information courier carrying a computer chip in his brain. He has to give up some of his personal memories for the job so that the information he is transporting will fit in his brain. However, the code to access this information is lost, meaning he risks having his mind perpetually wired, altered and eventually destroyed with material unrelated to his psyche. As usual in Hollywood, the conflict is resolved with the courier winning the battle to reclaim his mind. However, it is the panic over losing it that is of socio-cultural importance.

Films such as *Johnny Mnemonic*, showing artificial intelligence (AI) replacing our minds, are beginning to make their mark in popular culture. This is not a direct result of our fear of the actual technology that can do this, but a concern over who uses it. Technology is certainly not neutral; it is constructed with biases potentially threatening to society, especially those of corporate, government and military interests.

While pop culture can effectively represent our social panic, it typically fails to offer an in-depth analysis of just how such fear arises and how it might be remedied. Mass culture's most common reading of mind replacement is a one-sided perspective focusing only on apocalyptic doom. This viewpoint is always brought forth by the conventional narrative of good guy versus bad guy, which in the case of

downloading memory films entails humanity versus technology. Such narrative only serves to illustrate our fears as a caricature. It does not trace their social roots, and it makes the false assumption that technological progress is bound to be negative. What is needed along with a sympathetic pop culture, then, is a critical debate outside of a commercial paradigm.

In terms of technological art, where it would seem the issue of mind replacement would be prominently debated, there are actually only stirrings of a discourse on AI. Only a few artists—David Rokeby, Nancy Paterson, Cheryl Sourkes and Norman White, for example—consider it even tangentially. Rokeby of all of these has focused most clearly on the issue in the context of his ongoing explorations of interactive art.

Such a dearth of art production is understandable, however, since AI outside of that which performs basic tasks and calculations does not exist; consequently, the gradually growing cultural presence of it is easiest seen in science fiction. Yet Rokeby has still managed to take a proactive approach, constructing systems that actually function intelligently, albeit on a very basic level.

Rokeby's approach is particularly important to consider because AI research has been advancing exponentially to the degree that what was being done only recently would be barely recognizable today. Therefore, a need remains for culturally critical art approaching the issue before such criticism is either levelled or anachronistic.

**Like genetics and cloning, an ethical mine field has arisen from AI concerning, in particular, a questioning of scientific objectivity, that is to say, a consideration of who has the right to replicate intelligence and how it will be replicated.**



This, coupled with the need to address a technology that is rapidly changing, is why I am convinced that the focus of cultural criticism on AI should be placed within the frame of the current socio-political significance of recent developments in the field. This would determine how dominant ideologies of the times we currently live in could shape it. Rokeby's work is significant in this light as it proposes a democratic model for AI, one that works outside of authoritative ideological structures.

While Rokeby's work suggests positive thought by offering a liberating alternative, *Johnny Mnemonic* draws upon our fears without proposing solutions. However, both imply there is a sphere of influence around technology that is unsettling; Rokeby's discourse just does so more optimistically.

Societal fears over the abuse of memory replacement technology follow a history of panic over body replacement. Certainly, the body and our perceptions of it have been greatly influenced by technological change, and this has led to a recurrence of disappearing body scenarios. One of these is a now overly familiar discourse on the organic body's transformation in cyberspace to a virtual, or non-corporeal, one. In real economic terms, however, the idea of a disappearing body does not signify the fictive utopias of cyberspace but the reality of industrial society deeming corporeality obsolete due to technological advance. With massive layoffs, downsizing and, subsequently, chronically high unemployment, particularly in reasonably high-paying manufacturing jobs, the threat of body disappearance or at least obsolescence is being realized, not just discussed.

This threat is one that has appeared in science fiction since the dawning of the industrial age. *Blade Runner* is only one late-coming example among the numerous science fiction genre films showing robots, the natural replacement of the human body. The history of such films, including thinking, feeling robots now known as cyborgs, in fact, has a far lengthier history than would be expected.

Robot theme films literally began with the advent of motion pictures, which was when—and this is no coincidence—the industrial revolution was at its height. The first such film, *The Clown and the Automaton*, was released in 1897. The popularity of these films gradually began to rise; by the 1920s, dozens had been produced. It took until the 1960s for their popularity to peak, however.

Artists working with robotics, lacking in resources, and actually having to build working models, would arrive later. Or perhaps, as some may argue, their viewpoints reflect popular culture after it happened, and naturally postdate the entertainment media, albeit with a critical edge. Since the '70s, artists like Norman White and Simon Penny have worked with robots to create art works that interact with viewers. White's swim, speak and actually fuck. Penny's, more subtle, follow viewers in the gallery space, responsive to their movements.

It is logical that industrial-age references to the body through robots could be replaced by references to the mind

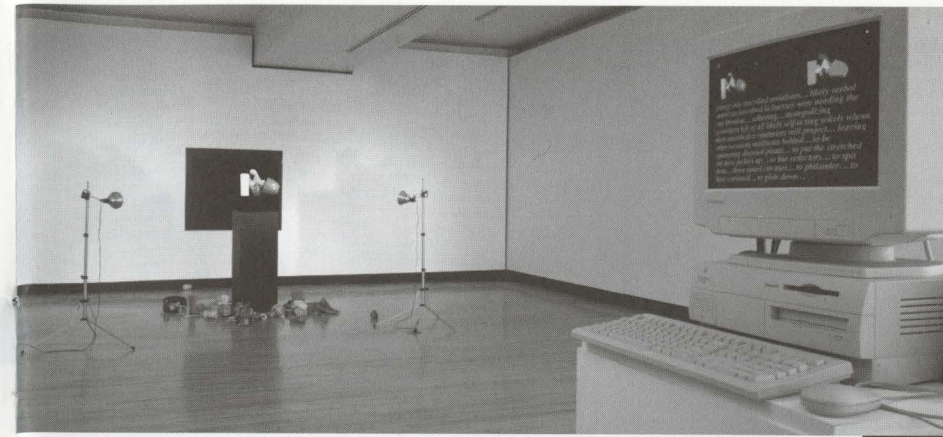
in today's information-based economy. To find the economic roots of disappearing mind panic, all one needs to do is consider the inappropriately named Smart technology and its performance of simple, clerical tasks. Smart technology's replacement of humans in some fields, particularly the service sector, is comparable to the role automation played in the industrial age, an age when a strong body ensured financial security. The ultimate apocalyptic fear would then be that if the mind becomes disembodied because of a fading organic body, organically wrought intelligence would subsequently disappear, leaving nothing.

Such expressed fears of the irrelevance of the biological brain have been amplified not only by the labour practices but by the ideological threat to liberal thinking society by late twentieth-century capitalism with its favouring of commodified, cost-efficient "intelligence" over the critical dialogues of the intellectual left. After all, we are told again and again that "in today's global economy, knowledge is capital." Right now, bankers, corporate executives, senior engineers and other managers of the new economy of intelligence designate bank machines, appliances and other technological devices doing the menial clerical labour once done by human beings as Smart. Along with the many other Smart products we now have "Smart cards," in reality fingerprints on plastic, which the Progressive Conservative government of Ontario has planned to use to track welfare fraud. At the same time, that government has divested from good, old organic intelligence, cutting billions of dollars from the provincial education budget in times when a good education is needed to keep one off welfare. It is no wonder our society may fear the mind is becoming unnecessary.

Machines imply an expedient way for the right to eventually rid themselves of those "pesky" left-leaning academics they attack so vocally, whose "non-applicable" knowledge will not further short-term profits in a techno-capitalist society. "Indeed," Andrew Ross notes, "AI and IT [industrial technology] have been instrumental in appropriating the knowledge of the knowledge-class in the event of the material absence, replacement, or withering away of that class."<sup>1</sup>

I believe that such economic fears play a significant role in causing the subject of artificial intelligence to be raised in popular cinema. Indeed, the history of robot films becoming popular much after when they first began to tell of the advent of the industrial age could well be mimicked by an increasing popularity of AI films as the technology develops and we go deeper and deeper into post-industrial society. The closer post-industrial society's technological advance leads to the technology chronicled in knowledge replication films, the quicker this *oeuvre* should grow.

While considering films relevant to a discourse on the cultural panic over AI, it is equally important to exclude film and art references to parallel—that is, autonomous—machine intelligence. It is, after all, not the same as replaced intelligence. Such an exclusion is obvious in the case of an unthreatening intelligence, like the warm and fuzzy R2D2 of



David Rokeby, *The Giver of Names*, 1998, installation view.  
Right: *Watch: College and Gordon*, 1998.

*Star Wars*. And the autonomous intelligence of Hal in 2001: *A Space Odyssey* is not in keeping with consciousness replacement, as Hal, a true product of the Cold War imagination, embodies human-caused nuclear destruction by technological evil inadvertently let loose. Certainly, the robots of White and Penny do not display replaced intelligence either.

Such a plot premise as *Johnny Mnemonic*'s future panic over information being inserted into one's mind has been seen in earlier films, including *Total Recall* (1991), *Demolition Man* (1993), *Strange Days* (1995) and *Dark City* (1998). The memory addition can be representative of technology gone awry (*Total Recall*), compared to a form of drug addiction (*Strange Days*), or perpetrated by the doings of evil conspirators (*Dark City*, *Johnny Mnemonic*, *Demolition Man*). Popular culture usually represents technology through science fiction, a genre these are all representative of. However, another film, *Synthetic Pleasures* (1996), is a documentary on current developments in AI with some relevant speculations on artificial memory.

The first film to display this downloading paradigm was *Brainstorm* (1983), featuring a machine that records physical and mental events in one person's brain and then replays them in the mind of another. But *Johnny Mnemonic*, based on the story Gibson wrote in 1981, comes from the earliest source, marking the beginnings of downloading memory discourse, not to film, but to the cyberpunk school of science fiction literature.

These fears are well-grounded in reality, because they trace developments in AI research. Since the '80s, when AI films began to be screened, AI researchers have realized that if their field is to be furthered, AI, instead of being based on a digital computer's performance of math equations or other simple commands, will have to be based on the neurological brain function. This new approach, known as connectionism, considers lived experience and unconscious instincts, the parts of the mind largely credited with determining intelligence. Considering unconscious and conscious memory as a significant part of reason, certainly is, Jeremy Campbell notes, "a startling departure from the standard







Stills from *Blade Runner*, dir. Ridley Scott, 1982, 115 min. Distribution: Warner Brothers Releasing. Production stills courtesy the Film Reference Library, Toronto.

serial computer, where data sits inertly in a memory cell, waiting to be looked at by a central process device."<sup>2</sup> It is also a sharp break from robots performing simple, pre-programmed tasks.

The unreplicated and even uncharted parts of the mind where memory is based are more connected to cognizant problem-solving than was once believed. Therefore, the unconscious may now be seen in a different light than it was when Freud segregated the unconscious (id) from rational thought or consciousness (ego), as well as from the go-between, or superego. Freud saw the unconscious as being cut off from logical decision-making. This positing or sectioning of the mind is problematic, though, because "our everyday reasoning is not governed primarily by the rules of logic or probability calculus, but depends to a surprisingly large extent on what we know, on the way our knowledge is organized in memory, and on how such knowledge is evoked."<sup>3</sup>

In noting this, Campbell provides a telling example of why there is a strong interest in the unconscious memory amongst AI researchers. He cites an incident from the

workaday world of software design in which Thomas Kelly, a civil engineer with unequalled expertise on the workings of a Sierra Nevada hydro-electric dam, was interviewed by software developers for the company Southern California Edison. These designers wanted to tap into his knowledge to write a program to determine potential flaws in the dam. While interviewing him, however, it became clear that applying his problem-solving skills was more than a matter of recording mathematical solutions. Kelly could not clearly state his methods because his troubleshooting was based on intuition lying deep in his unreplicable id. Unsurprisingly, then, writing such a program proved impossible. However, if intuitive AI had been developed, a successful program could likely have been written.

Some AI researchers believe using a biological structure as a model requires not only a closer mirroring of brain function, however, but also the design of programs or machines to grow and evolve. This is to say they would not necessarily function in a controlled, calculated manner, the way digital computers do today. One of such solutions is Thomas Ray's "Tierra," a "self-replicating," "mutating" machine, meaning the



program develops independently in ways previously unpredicted. Noting his progress, he recalls,

The first time that my self-replicating program ran on my virtual computer, without crashing the real computer that it was emulated on.... [a]ll hell broke loose. The power of evolution had been unleashed inside the machine, but accelerated to...megahertz speeds.<sup>4</sup>

This process of artificial growth certainly raises a creepy, Social Darwinism out-of-control-scenario. One of the driving ambitions behind Ray's experiment is that "evolutions are played out in time spans which are very large compared to a scientific career.... The scenario of a super-evolution of a computer is raised at a pace eons more rapid than the slow pace of our own evolution."<sup>5</sup> However, Ray continues, warning of the problems of permitting such evolution:

Freely evolving autonomous artificial entities should be seen as potentially dangerous to organic life, and should

always be confined by some kind of containment facility, at least until their real potential is well understood.... Evolution remains a self-interested process, and even the interests of confined digital organisms may conflict with our own.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps this is the ultimate fear of intelligence technology: that, as depicted in *Total Recall*, technology could gain a life of its own, one that people cannot control.

This is not the only concern though; there is also the question of who would run such containment facilities, and who would maintain the controlling interests in so-called evolution projects. If Bill Clinton's quick spearheading of legislation to control human cloning is an indicator, the regulator would be the American government with, of course, the backing of the military and business. Then, the agenda would in all probability be right-leaning, if not far to the far right.

In tandem with AI research concerning knowledge replication and evolution, research in artificial emotional intelligence (synthetic sentience) and artificial life (AL) is being steadily pursued. AL, while often categorized as AI, actually differs considerably. It proposes not disembodied digital intelligence as does artificial intelligence but a constructed life form with a material presence. There are considerable possibilities for application, ranging from the entertainment world to the replacement of even more employees in service-oriented positions. In a science fiction scenario, fears are raised of the replacement or production of humans, although human cloning has of late usurped much of this panic. Whatever the use, it is clear that if so-called virtual people are emotionally responsive, they will, of course, be more convincing than a robot answering simple questions in a mechanistic monotone. One of a number of possibilities if the technology is developed would be that "rentable organisms' with root personality attribute traits will become a marketable commodity."<sup>7</sup> It is clear how dehumanizing such technology would be if exploited.

While virtual emotions do still remain an unreplicated frontier, this scenario has been raised in memory replacement films as well as in the *Mondo* and *Wired* school of techno-utopian journalism: "In the future, one can imagine jacking into a system, loading the appropriate software, and thinking the ideas.... The software of the future will be programs that run on your computer: your mind."<sup>8</sup> Such a technological development, while perhaps convenient, certainly does raise disconcerting possibilities.

If those researching AI work, as they most often do, within the frame of creating knowledge that will ultimately serve business and the military, machines either emulating or duplicating the unconscious and the memories of lived experience are on the waiting list of entrants into the late capitalist economy. Picturing the possibility of downloading technological memory into the biological brain, Henry See rhetorically asks if there is "anyone who will want to



give up his mind to Bill Gates? 'Dear User: Sorry about that virus in the release version of Learning Spanish.' Thank-you, no."<sup>9</sup> See consequently stresses the importance of considering "who is it that will 'think' such thoughts, what could having thoughts thought for you mean in terms of learning, and what is your relationship to such thoughts, etc.?"<sup>10</sup> Given the possibility of a corporate and military monopoly over intelligence, the "thinker" is more likely to be the maker than the user. The "thinker" could then provide carefully filtered intelligence for recipients that will ideologically serve the "thinkers" own agenda. Surrendering these almost sacred parts of humanity, those parts that now most clearly separate us from machines and, subsequently, commodity, are the ultimate definition of powerlessness.

Of course, the possibilities of AI and AL aren't as tangible as the very real fears workers are now experiencing with Smart technology. However, at some undefined point in the future, this could well change. The notion of advanced knowledge and especially unconscious and emotional experience being replaceable in the future is in its implications even more disconcerting than today's Smart technology when it comes to potential for replacement of employees.

Such issues concerning the problematics of interests controlling AI and AL are not being considered in films; again, in these pictures, the enemy is technology itself, a technology which, made out to be autonomous and seamless, cannot be influenced by outside factors. For this reason I believe that a debate outside of mainstream culture concerning possible ethical abuse of power in the technological replication of human minds is urgently necessary.

Simon Penny, not only an artist but an especially perceptive writer knowledgeable on technological art, is aware of the concerns arising from AI, and he notes, for this reason, the importance of analyzing AI and AL by way of technological art:

These issues do open an important area which artists should probe, that of the seeming intelligence of machines and the naivety of humans to let themselves be convinced that the machine is smart.... Why is this information "intelligent"? What is the criteria for assessment? How is this more "objective" than any other way?<sup>11</sup>

There are those, often utopians, who strictly see technology as a transparent, objective liberator that will help create a better, more productive society. Certainly many AI and AL researchers, trusting the Galilean scientific method in which they were schooled, share the belief that both are being objectively developed. As Penny says, an art that counters this naive tenet is needed, an art that forms an ethical critique of scientific objectivity, taking into account the socio-political frame their research has occurred in. Mackenzie Wark notes "[w]e need to know what regimes

of power [technological art]... partakes of, so we can consider it critically useful as art...."<sup>12</sup>

However, David Rokeby stresses the importance of approaching such an analysis cautiously, and in doing so, he raises an issue concerning all artists dealing with technology. "Artists," he says, "are in a position to take the lead in generating a discussion of these [technological] concerns... [but artists] are also in danger of becoming apologists for industrial, corporate, and institutional uses of these technologies."<sup>13</sup> However, technological artworks for the most part serve little or no commercial purpose, so artists are in the position to work outside the ideological and creative restrictions of market-based production. By staying on the margins, artists should be able to avoid being either subsumed by, or connected to, opposing interests, provided their work maintains a critical edge.

Rokeby has managed to directly address such technology through a piece entitled *The Giver of Names*, in which he has built a metaphoric yet working model for replicated unconsciousness. In doing so, Rokeby provides a paradigm for AI that is opposed to control, economic and otherwise; a paradigm of generosity and interactivity.

In his first version of *The Giver of Names* (1997), Rokeby produced a representation of his private thoughts and allowed viewer interaction with it. The piece comprises a computer designed to contain everything he had written over twelve years—essays, personal texts, and an unfinished novel. The computer's memory therefore references Rokeby's memory.

To activate the piece, the viewer types a word on the computer keyboard, which will search for it and then find words from Rokeby's text that would logically follow it—shopping and then centre, for instance. Continuing in this way, it would eventually produce sentences. In response, the computer generated sentences: some bizarre, some humorous, and some insightful.

The viewers' ability to interact with Rokeby's digitized unconscious thoughts illustrates his desire to keep intelligence democratic, free of private interests. By adding interactivity to AI, he transfers his consciousness to the public realm.

The updated, considerably different version of *The Giver of Names* (1998) adds image-recognition software, capturing with a camera an object on a pedestal chosen by the viewer from a variety of items including children's toys, a mixing bowl, and a plastic ketchup container Rokeby placed in the gallery. The resulting image is then analytically matched to a database of objects, ideas and sensory responses. Finally, the computer reacts textually, constructing phrases or sentences read aloud by the computer. This phrase, however, is far from a literal description; actually its meaning is unrelated to what it is supposedly describing. Literal phrases gradually become stranger and funnier, resulting in nonsensical statements such as "to upholster an inferior planet."

The computer's "interpretation" of each subject the viewer chooses to photograph speaks of how language alters the represented object. Reflecting on this new version of *The Giver of Names*, Rokeby makes clear his intent is to consider the "interaction with intelligence to highlight the connection between perception [interpreting the object] and language [the computer-spoken sentence], bringing into focus the processes that make perception viable, but also biased and fallible."<sup>14</sup> Language and its shaping by dominant ideology will likely continue to play a significant role in determining how AI and AL is applied. Language use has certainly been integral to Smart technology. This term of course was deliberately chosen, over less utilitarian and more academic words like knowledge or wisdom.

Rokeby presents an ethical alternative to such ingrained ideology by rendering transparent the process of representing the real through language *vis à vis* machine intelligence. Subsequently, then, he implies there are existing biases to AI and AL, biases that again have created fears in our culture over artificial technology's potential to be developed to counter progressive thinking.

*The Giver of Names* strategically employs technology before that technology is read through the filter of mass-produced commodity, something I hope is a wake-up call for further critically proactive art. Rokeby is able to do this by using a digital copy of his writing and a sometimes stream-of-consciousness database as metaphors for the artificial unconscious. He observes in his discussion of the work of technological artists including Norman White that "The Holy Grail, [the ultimate goal] for these [technological] artists, is the self-replicating, self-sustaining machine—artificial life."<sup>15</sup> But it is he himself who has come closest.

Unfortunately, there is a general lack of work analyzing AI and AL. Too much technological art is formalist-based, preferring to fetishize technology rather than critically reflect upon it. Therefore, many artists wait for the technology to arrive to approach the technology formally. To observe this tendency, one need only look at the many electronic art fairs being held across the world, or for that matter consider why it took seventy-five years longer for robotics to appear in contemporary art than it did in cinema.

Waiting for and then keeping up with a given form of technology can be problematic. Penny comments on how the very complexity of technology has impeded critical discourse in technological art:

If rapidly increasing standards make... computer artists feel forced to continually upgrade and retrain, then little time is left to do the work of artmaking: the creative analysis and questioning of the relationship between these technologies and culture.<sup>16</sup>

As well, the cost of staying abreast of technological change can be prohibitive for artists. However, artists can easily

avoid such pitfalls by bypassing the formalist route and critically approaching a given technology—the point of technological art in the first place—with strategies such as metaphor, signification and virtual representation. The same kind of abstraction or extrapolation of future technology that has occurred in critical science fiction as well as in essay form, is, as Rokeby's art demonstrates, equally effective in an art context.

I believe further critical readings into AI and AL are clearly necessary to construct a healthy discourse in the field of technological art. However, as with film references, an increase in frequency will likely be seen in the future. But societal fears of intellectual obsolescence rooted in ethical concerns over AI should be analyzed prior to corporate and/or military ideology building an all-encompassing artificial intelligence framework. Such alternate models promoting the progressive use of artificial memory and critiquing its delegation to a market-based economy would best be constructed by "liberal" artists, writers and academics, who non-coincidentally are the very people the neo-conservative romancers of Smart technology and its offspring most despise.

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#### Notes

1. Andrew Ross, "The New Smartness" in *Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994), p. 332.
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4. George B. Dyson, *Darwin among the Machines: The Evolution of Global Intelligence* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1997), p. 125.
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6. Charles Osman, *Synthetic Sentience on Demand*, [www.mondo2000.com/left%20brain.html](http://www.mondo2000.com/left%20brain.html).
7. R. Holtzman, quoted in Henry See, "Review of Digital Mantras by Steven R. Holtzman," *Leonardo On-Line*, <http://mitpress.mit.edu>.
8. Henry See, *op. cit.*
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11. Simon Penny, "Review of Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience," *Leonardo On-Line*, <http://mitpress.mit.edu>.
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13. David Rokeby "Transforming Mirrors: Subjectivity and Control in Electronic Media," *Critical Issues in Electronic Media*, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134.
14. David Rokeby, Artist's Statement, *The Giver of Names*.
15. Rokeby, *Critical Issues in Electronic Media*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.
16. Simon Penny, "Consumer Culture and the Technological Imperative: The Artists in Dataspace," *Critical Issues in Electronic Media*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.





# Where the **SOUTH** and the **NORTH** Meet

**Latino identity and cultural heterogeneity**

**by Alberto Gomez**

Image based on a piece by Joaquín Torres-García.

**LUIS FELIPE NOÉ**, despite the biblical resonance of his last name and his towering cultural presence in Argentina, is an artist and writer who is practically unknown in North America. One day he told me a story about an opening of his in New York City in the early '60s. It was at a time when installation art had just arrived on the New York art scene. Noé was talking with Richard Serra and commented, innocently enough, practically in passing, that "in Argentina, we have been experimenting with installations for several years." Noé remembered a very North American response. "That is bullshit," exclaimed the famous minimalist artist as he stormed away, negating emphatically and in no uncertain terms the possibility that something could occur in the periphery before it did in the centre.

Like Linneas, the famous Swedish naturalist who squished with his foot those insects that didn't fit into his classification, the American minimalist squashed the Argentinean artist with his position.<sup>1</sup>

In Canada—as in Argentina—the art world is largely an elite domain influenced by European aesthetics and New York markets. To be a young artist and Latino in the Canadian art world is to occupy a doubly difficult position. One must struggle to be recognized in a competitive environment where worth is defined elsewhere, and simultaneously struggle for the recognition of different histories and visual languages that do not necessarily correspond to the "shared" markers of either Canadian culture or the international art world. Talking with a number of young Latino artists working in Toronto, most of whom have recently graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD), the struggles and difficulties of being artists and Latinos in Canadian society were at the centre of our discussions. As conversation circled around a search for cultural identity and a desire to feel part of society, that is to experience a collective sense of being Canadian, a dilemma of artistic identity and self-definition emerged. How does one create in a cultural space where you do not belong yet must exist?

Ticio Escobar, a Paraguayan cultural critic, has argued that what characterizes culture is the collective experience of a community. In turn, he proposes that this collective experience is shaped by narratives of nationhood whereby "the less presence ethnic cultural formations have in the national configuration of a society, the more marginalized they are."<sup>2</sup> If we (as the readers of this article and participants in a process of thinking through questions of culture) can agree with Escobar, then perhaps we have a starting point from which to begin to consider the dilemma of artistic identity facing the young Latino artists living in Toronto. If we add to this starting point of discussion the specificity of the local as well as nation, then the heterogeneity of Toronto's social geography considerably complicates the issues of cultural formation and marginalization that Escobar raises.

The "national configuration" of Canada is historically characterized by an Anglo hegemony that encompasses, among other things, the colonization of indigenous cultures, the suppression of sovereignty movement in Quebec, and the marginalization of non-British immigrants. In Toronto, this national configuration exists in relationship to the presence of over a hundred ethnic cultural formations that creates a complex and fraught social fabric. In turn, the diversity of this social fabric is subsumed by categories such as Latino that encompass a vast array of historical, cultural and geographical differences. In the context of the collective experience of community, naming itself becomes a socially and politically complex act of definition and containment. "Latino" is a term that some young artists of Latin American and Spanish-speaking Caribbean backgrounds in Canada use to identify themselves. In mainstream culture, it markets salsa, mambo and dance clubs. In North American politics, it describes a demographic voting block, especially in California, New Mexico, Florida, and Texas. Yet Latino in the sense of being from Latin America embraces the traditions and histories of over twenty countries and many different ethnic cultural formations including First Peoples, Arabic, African, Spanish, Jewish, British, and German.<sup>3</sup>

Given this contested territory of geography and naming, how then does one define marginalization within a heterogeneous space? How does one express a sense of belonging or alienation from a society in which not only Latinos but many different groups confront a cultural dilemma of artistic identity and self-definition? Is it through the affirmation of geographical origins and the legacies of diaspora—whether African, Asian or Latin American? Or does it emerge through a cross-cultural exchange between ethnic cultural formations that is happening here and now? Is a sense of belonging—that non-definable yet urgent need to feel one has the right to occupy space and to participate in society—formed by the assertion of one's cultural specificity in opposition to Anglo hegemony? Or is it created by an ever-fluid process of exchange and sharing of different experiences and histories?



According to the Argentine critic Néstor García Canclini, "hegemony is distinct from domination—which is exercised against adversaries through violent means—in that it is a political and ideological process whereby a class or sector obtains a preferential position of power in a structure of class alliances by allowing space for subaltern groups to develop independent cultural practices that do not always correspond to or reproduce the dominant mores of the society."<sup>4</sup> Juan Carlos Portantiero, an Uruguayan critic, also calls upon Gramsci's insights into power and society in his assertion that "hegemony occurs when a constellation of cultural and political practices deployed by a dominant class facilitates the development of other social groups under their control who mediate the construction of a voluntary consensus by partially sacrificing their own interests for the sake of universal and corporate interests."<sup>5</sup> In light of their



*Sun 1*, Rafael Iglesias, 1989, oil on metal, 1.0 x 0.66 m.

analyses, another question arises: how can either specific cultural identities or cross-cultural exchanges develop in a way that does not reproduce the mechanisms of cultural hegemony?

In Latin America, the struggle for an artistic expression that would challenge cultural hegemony crystallized in the vanguard movements of the 1920s and 1930s. For artists struggling against the domination of European influences, the search for a culture specific to the Americas focused on the valorization of indigenous culture. In Peru, José Carlos Mariátegui, a writer and political theorist, looked to the history and struggles of indigenous peoples for an analysis of land reform and revolutionary justice based on the social organization and spiritual vision of the Quechua peoples.<sup>6</sup> In Brazil, artists and intellectuals struggled against a legacy of European images and stories of inordinate numbers of man-eating ignoble savages in their country. Oswald Andrade, a futurist poet of the 1920s, responded by writing a manifesto in which he turned the European projection of the "savage" cannibal on its head. By asking "tupy or not

tupy, that is the question,"<sup>7</sup> he connected Hamlet's existential question of being with the indigenous peoples of coastal Brazil, the Tupí-Guaraní. In a counteraction of cultural cannibalism, he argued that the Brazilians should savour European artistic references as morsels to be eaten, and to shit out what they didn't need from the other end.

In Uruguay, the painter Joaquín Torres-García returned to his home town of Montevideo after a forty-year absence to discover his countrymen were indifferent to local culture. In response he drew a map of South America that inverted the centre and the periphery of the Americas by reversing the poles so that "our north is the South," as "we shouldn't have a north except to contrast with our south. So let's turn the map upside down and voilà, that is our real position, not how the rest of the world sees us."<sup>8</sup> Through an ironic gesture, Torres-García sought to reverse a process of cultural dependency and to validate South American experience in relationship to the hegemony of North American culture.

The vanguard movements of the 1930s looked to a precolonial past in order to reinvent a postcolonial future. In this sense, they offer all artists working in the Americas today a cultural legacy that challenges the dominance of European and North American artistic references. Yet at the same time, the historical conditions in Canada are different from those that framed the vanguard movements of Latin America and their counterattack against cultural colonialism. Current conditions of globalization call into question not only the ideas but also the tools of a vanguard struggle. Technological developments and the displacements of peoples create another kind of neocolonial condition, perhaps even more conflicted than that of Latin America in the 1930s. In the case of Canada, the north/south vectors of dependency and domination are another reversal of Joaquín Torres-García's inverted map. As Latinos, we are in the north, but we dream and imagine the South.

For young Latino artists living in Toronto, many of whom came to Canada when they were very young and some of whom were born here, Latin America remains a compelling reference *a la tierra*. It is the source of their cultural traditions and mother tongue. To be Canadian becomes a process of *el destierro*: to be unearthened in the conceptual sense of *tierra* as earth or land encompassing space, time, history and memory. Often the sons and daughters of political refugees fleeing dictatorships in the southern cone, bitter wars in Central America, or economic impoverishment, they did not choose to settle here. Yet their formation of language and identity is also shaped by experiences of growing up in Canada. Caught between history and place, memories of political conflict clash with the pull of consumer culture. Living between languages and dreams,

they sense they are "aliens" in the society in which they exist and from which they come. In Latin America, they are identified as "different" for the way they speak Spanish and for their North American acculturation; in Canada, they are immigrants, newcomers, hyphenated citizens.

Through a process of coming and going, of living here and remembering there, the young Latino artists I know experience a sense of displacement—of existing between poles—that falls outside fixed categorizations of race and class. In Latin America, *mulatto*, *mestizo* and *indígena* demarcate a complex mixing of peoples and the specificity of indigenous culture. In Canada, racial identity is framed by categories of "white," "Black" and "people of colour" that displaces a fluid zone of *mestizaje*; Latino becomes a designation of racial otherness that absorbs rather than affirms cultural differences. In Latin America, economic disparities are brutal and visible, casting class differences into sharp relief. Here, disparities are harsh but more hidden, with class differences masked by the surface images of a mass consumer culture. For Latinos moving between the poles of North and South, economic disjunctions within the Americas further confuse class distinctions. Living in the promised land of Canada, they face economic limitations yet are viewed by those in Latin America as economically advantaged.

In order to act upon the world, and perhaps transform it, one must be in the world, as Edward Said has said.<sup>9</sup> Yet the Latino experience in Canada is overwhelmingly one of being in between worlds. How, then, does one represent

the ethnic cultural formation of Latinos in Canada? How can one synthesize the collective experience of being in between worlds through artistic expression? Is it a case of creating a visual language that reflects an experience of transition from one society to another? Is there a hybrid culture in formation? Is there a process of assimilation with the dominant culture unfolding? Or is there not yet a descriptive language to express the interplay of homogeneity and heterogeneity within Canadian borders?

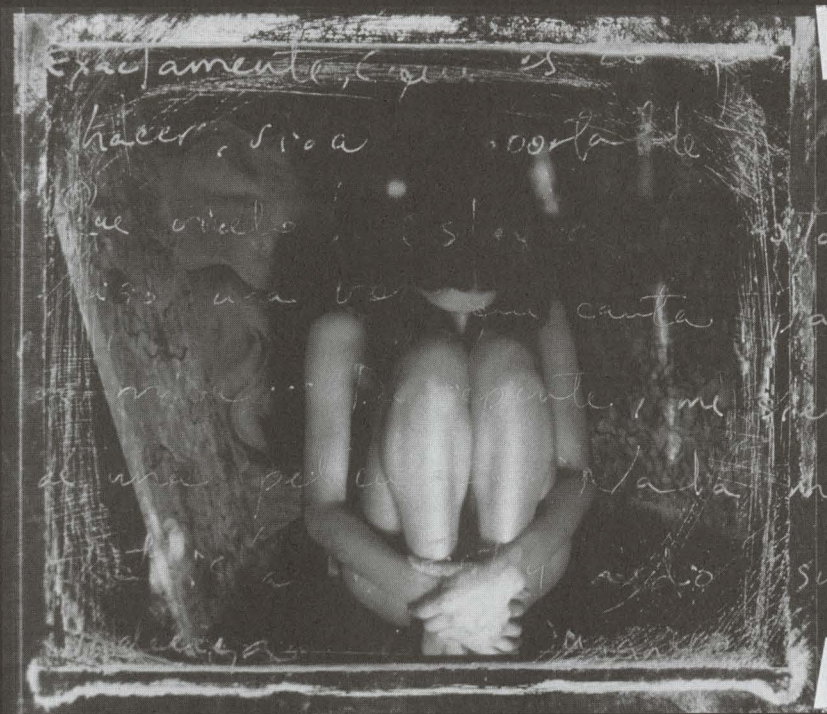
In Ticio Escobar's discussion of the collective experience of community and culture, he notes the link between the marginalization of ethnic cultural formations and the marginalization of non-Western and indigenous artistic expression. "There exists the myth," writes Escobar, "that only in modern Western civilization are there specific cultural practices superior and mature enough to reach the pinnacle of spiritual enlightenment, and thus to become the unique, universal expression of humankind."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, all the Latino artists I talked with agree that the Canadian educational system, including post-secondary art colleges such as OCAD, continues to valorize and emphasize European culture as the most important, and in most cases, only cultural reference for artistic training. Other cultural traditions, while not explicitly denigrated, are marginalized as optional or personal areas of study. While a few courses at OCAD provide non-European cultural viewpoints and histories, they do not reflect an institutional agenda to incorporate diverse cultural perspectives into the general curriculum. Some instructors at OCAD—at their own initiative—discuss

*Untitled*, Ilse Gudiño, 1997, silver print, installation detail, 0.66 x 1.0 m.





Untitled, Ana Raquel Ramirez,  
1997, colour photographic print.



art from a perspective critical of the Eurocentric and colonial focus of the education system. Most do not. Despite years of "identity politics," the educational system still reinforces a hegemonic conception of culture, in which all students, regardless of background or interests, must learn and be judged by the conventions of the European artistic tradition.

Like many different cultural groups at OCAD, Latino artists have responded to the division of art into European and "other" by organizing themselves as a collective entity and sponsoring exhibitions in the school atrium. Once they graduate they exhibit their work in small cafés and other non-traditional venues in collaboration with other young artists. In or out of school, the struggle to create a collective space of exhibition and exchange is a difficult one. Groupings tend to coalesce and break apart, sometimes lacking common perspectives or clear objectives. Many young artists—not only Latinos—do not have the time or the economic means to maintain a commitment to a collective project. Most of those who have graduated from art college work for subsistence wages while paying student debts, usually ranging from \$25,000 to \$35,000. Few are able to dedicate themselves to an artistic career or find work related to their professional training. A younger generation of artists faces a bleak economic future and an educational system that encourages a form of debt peonage whereby students acquire huge loans without the resources to repay them. Whether Latino or not, lack of economic opportunity is a common problem of youth.

Coming of age at a moment when funding resources are diminishing, young artists find their access to a government

funded system of grants and artist-run centre galleries limited by an older generation of artists, who often are unwilling to accede territory at an institutional level and to integrate younger artists into their cultural milieu. Even if younger artists gain access to an exhibition in the artist-run centre system, there remains the issues of peer jury selection and critical reception. A lack of familiarity with Latino artistic traditions, or for that matter African, Caribbean or Asian aesthetics, affects how work is understood and received by juries and institutions. In general, public museums, private galleries and artist-run centres—with their attendant curators and dealers—continue to uphold and perpetuate European artistic traditions. Qualities of "exotic," "spiritual" or "colourful" are ascribed to non-European-based artistic expression, to name only a few of the most common labels applied to Latin American, Caribbean and African art. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these labels are internalized and endorsed by artists themselves as a way to gain access to funding and exhibition opportunities.

While I do not dispute the need of artists to gain access in order to survive economically, I have to ask how this affects a process of cultural self-determination. Is the continuous erosion of public funding over the last few years forcing artists to play a roulette-wheel game of gaining access to private and public galleries at any cost? Does there exist within the institutional art world a space where artists can meet to exhibit their work and exchange ideas with the goal of self-definition? In part, a response to these questions is circumscribed by the ways in which ethnic cultural formations have been appropriated and codified by a state policy

of multiculturalism. In addition to the barriers that a European-based educational system and the institutional art world creates, the broader context of the society and ideology complicates how issues of identity and access intersect.

Multiculturalism, as an official platform and not-so-official ideology of the Canadian establishment, constructs a territory of nostalgia and folklore that categorizes and isolates cultures while affirming the openness of society to diversity. Within the institutional art world, European traditions and aesthetics remain unchallenged; within the multicultural mosaic, different cultural traditions coexist without dialogue. Under the umbrella of multiculturalism, cultural diversity becomes the handmaiden of hegemony. Even when different ethnic cultural formations affirm their artistic identity and self-definition through events such as Black History Month, the Latino Harbourfront Festival and Asian New Year celebrations, their effectiveness is circumscribed by the multicultural space they are consigned to. For a brief time, they are celebrated for their entertainment value and local colour, only to disappear again into the white fog of dominant culture.

Given the lack of a broad based political opposition to dominant culture (as there was for example during the time of the Latin American vanguard movements of the 1920s and 1930s), one of the risks of accepting the multicultural label is to end up becoming part of the system one is struggling against. In the name of achieving a cultural space for artistic expression, "playing the system" is viewed as a cynical but necessary task. In theory, this cynicism is tempered by the promise of subverting the terms of engagement and of serving community interests. In practice, the strategy of subverting from within may benefit individuals; but it rarely calls into question the marginalization of the community one is a part of from dominant culture.

Instead of trying to play by the rules, I think that we should refuse our assigned role as a multicultural "other." In so doing, I am not arguing for an "oppositional" artistic practice as it is valorized in classic modernist terms, in which art is either transformative or part of the status-quo.

Nor am I raising the banner of community art or cultural diversity as an oppositional gesture against the system. Rather I am talking about the creation of a space in society for both collective and individual expression in which dialogue and exchange across cultures emerges. Whether we are Latino or categorized as any "other" identity group, our objective should be to assert our presence as cross-cultural catalysts and as active creators in Canadian culture. What becomes contested in the process is precisely the issue of space: what space has been assigned to us and what space we take.

For the dominant culture, the orderly control of public space (and hence the security of private property) is essential for the maintenance of hegemony. Through public

space, the ideology of the society is managed and the history and collective memory of a nation consolidated. When Caribana threatened to spill over from University Avenue to engulf the downtown core and many different cultural communities, it was removed from the heart of the city to the perimeter of Lakeshore Boulevard. Control of the city centre was re-established and Caribana became an African-American event rather than a city-wide celebration. During the World cup playoffs in 1998, spontaneous street parties with Latinos, Brazilians and Portuguese drumming and dancing spilled onto downtown city streets. Police with riot gear and horses quickly ringed the area

as if a violent explosion was unfolding. Through containment, the marginalization of our presence within public space of Canada's largest city translates as our absence from the collective imaginary of Canada's national culture.

In Latin America, it is the diversity and interchange of many cultures that produces a collective imaginary and sense of belonging—an identity. In Canada, this diversity also exists. Yet the reality of this diversity, with its multiplicity of personal and popular meanings, is not reflected in the creation of public space where differences are central to a social cohesion. Nor is there an openness within artistic

La Caridad, Oscar de la Flores, lithograph, 61x91 cm.





institutions to the representations of crossing over from one culture to another, of living in more than one language at once and in between worlds. For our presence to be acknowledged, what needs to be vindicated is the importance of heterogeneity to all identity formation.

Given the context of a global technology and an increasingly global economy, the affirmation of identity formation based upon a diversity of cultural traditions is urgently needed. As a globalizing force, technology promises innovation, access, and a network for cultural exchange. It delivers a framework for the consolidation of dominant culture, the homogenization of difference, and the fragmentation of collective experience. Within the globalizing economy, free trade places a corporate spin on multiculturalism; public and cultural spaces (such as streets, libraries, parks, arm's-length funding agencies and museums) are appropriated by market (read multinational) ideology. In contrast, when cultural diversity is integral to the collective experience of a community, the influence of global culture does not necessarily signify a monolithic imposition nor the individualization of culture. On the contrary, the interchange between the local and the global can provoke an exchange and questioning of aesthetics and artistic vision that strengthens the collective imaginary of the nation as one of diversity rather than sameness.

Néstor García Canclini asks "do the opening (of informative and communicational possibilities) and hybridization suppress the differences among cultural strata that cross, producing a generalized pluralism, or do they engender new segmentations?"<sup>11</sup> In answer to his question, I want to propose that in the everyday reality of cultural exchange there exists the potential to challenge the pluralism of a global village. In the opening of local collective and aesthetic spaces of heterogeneity, there exists resistance to the neutralization of difference by hegemonic culture. When a national culture incorporates a diversity of cultures as integral to a collective imaginary, identity can become a journey in search of a present rather than the reification of historical differences.

Despite all the obstacles they face, the young Latino artists I know are committed to the process of becoming artists, and to a search for new forms of expression. Together with different ethnic cultural formations in Toronto, their struggles to create and reclaim different spaces for the production and reception of culture have the potential to rupture the mirror-images of the metropolis, not just create pale and deformed imitations. Through the meeting of the global and the local and the movement of peoples around the world, categorizations are being called into question. Identity is being constructed through intersecting and often contradictory layers of experiences, similarities and differences that are always in flux and reformulation. How to create cultural spaces for an expression of this identity formation that do not reinforce marginalization or perpetuate the system is a pressing question for

all those committed to thinking through issues of culture and heterogeneity.

*Alberto Gomez is a writer and artist living in Toronto and Argentina.*

#### Acknowledgements

*I would like to thank Oscar de la Flores, Ilse Gudiño, Rafael Iglesias, Linda Narvaez, Ana Raquel Ramirez, and Gino Ravina for our conversations about art, identity and culture. Thanks to David McIntosh and Judith Doyle for editing suggestions. A special thanks to Dot Tuer for her insights and editing.*

#### Notes

1. The story about Linneas comes from an article written by Luis Felipe Noé on identity and power. In the article, he quotes Kenneth Kemble's description of a process of internal colonization that begins with Linneas's casual act of entomological genocide. See Luis Felipe Noé, "El arte de América Latina no necesita pasaporte," (The art of Latin America doesn't need a passport), *Fin de Siglo*, November 1988.
2. Ticio Escobar, *El Mito del Arte y el Mito del Pueblo: Cuestiones Sobre Arte Popular* (Asunción: R. Peroni ediciones, 1986), p. 22.
3. While some communities in Canada have chosen to self-identify in terms of race or colour rather than ethnicity, I am choosing to adopt Escobar's term of ethnic cultural formations from a Latin American perspective in a broad and inclusive sense. In Latin America, notions of "race" and "colour" have been criticized as anthropological and European constructs, while cultural traditions form the basis of self-identification. The interrogation of categories of race versus culture is also the subject of an ongoing debate amongst intellectuals in the United States typified by the issues raised by Cornell West and Jorge Klor de Alva. (See the discussion between West and Klor de Alva published as "Our Next Race Question: The Uneasiness between Blacks and Latinos" in *The Latino Studies Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
4. Néstor García Canclini, quoted in Ticio Escobar, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
5. Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Los Usos de Gramsci* (México: Folios Ediciones S.A. México, 1981), p. 151.
6. For an overview of Mariátegui's writings in translation see: José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971).
7. Oswaldo de Andrade, "Anthropophagite Manifesto," translated and reprinted in Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 312.
8. Joaquín Torres-García, "The School of the South," translated and reprinted in Dawn Ades, *op. cit.*, p. 321.
9. For Said's arguments on the role of the critic, see Edward Said, *The World, The Text and The Critic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).
10. Ticio Escobar, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
11. Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 280.

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# Auschwitz in the Age of Mass Tourism

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT JAN VAN PELT

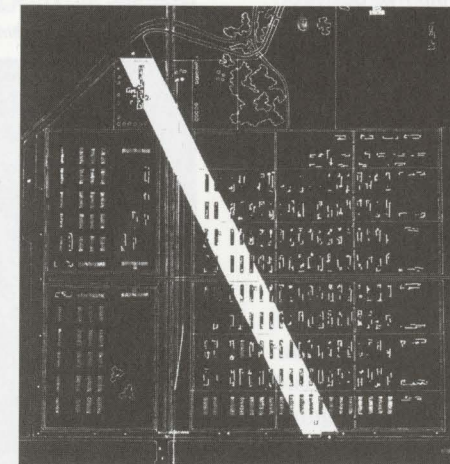
BY KENNETH HAYES



In 1996, Debórah Dwork (Rose Professor of Holocaust History at Clark University) and Robert Jan van Pelt (Professor of cultural history in the architecture school at the University of Waterloo) published *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present*, a comprehensive history of the transformation of an ordinary town into the concentration camp where over one million people were murdered. Their work led Polish president Alexander Kwasniewski and Miles Lerman, leader of a coalition of Jewish organizations, to consult them on the future of the site. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Collaborative, of which Robert Jan van Pelt is director, includes Debórah Dwork, Donald McKay, Dereck Revington, Valerio Rynnimeri and twelve students and graduates of the University of Waterloo School of Architecture. Van Pelt discusses their *Strategy for the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau* with Kenneth Hayes.

Kenneth Hayes: In the epilogue of your book *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present*, you essentially endorsed a 1959 scheme by Oskar and Zofia Hansen. You described that scheme as a broad pathway cutting diagonally across the site of Birkenau, engaging with, avoiding and surrounding various sites of different significance, forming a great platform from which to view the entire site, without any kind of representational or commemorative monument. Since completing that book, you have been engaged directly with the planning of the sites of Auschwitz and Birkenau. What is your opinion of such a bold, avant-garde scheme in light of the arising conditions of mass tourism?

Robert Jan van Pelt: Let us review the basis of our endorsement. The narrative structure of the epilogue deals essentially with conflict over the question of who owns Auschwitz. There are clearly two main groups in a contest of ownership: Poles, who were the first inmates, and the Jews. The conflict is in the way each group sees the site. The Poles bring to the site a very traditional notion of Christian martyrdom, which means that they see the people who died there, some sixty thousand Poles, as witnesses to Christ. These were generally people who did something to get into Auschwitz: they were resisters, or intellectuals who were arrested because they were the elite. They can ultimately claim their death in the traditional heroic model of the martyr. If we look at the Jewish victims, and we now talk of around a million victims, the majority were women and children who were simply murdered. There is in Judaism a concept of martyrdom on behalf of the name of God but it demands a certain consciousness that one affirm, even if involuntarily, the unity of God. But there were many Jews who had become Christian, or who were atheistic, or many, many, who were simply too young to be conscious of a death on behalf of something larger than themselves. This idea of martyrdom doesn't work for them. Jewish circles generally hesitate to describe the victims of the holocaust as martyrs. Now, an exception is a particular Israeli Zionist perspective which relates the murder of the six million Jews to the resurrection of the Jewish nation. This position is supported by the fact that the state of Israel gave citizenship, *post facto*, to all six million Jews killed in the Holocaust, so they died ultimately as citizens of the new state, and on behalf of something, namely the resurrection of the Zionist state. Aside from that perspective, we can see that the



Plan for the Hansen monument at Birkenau, *Forum*, 1959. Opposite: photo of Birkenau by Kenneth Hayes.

Polish use of traditional forms of Christian piety to commemorate the death of their compatriots as martyrs is slightly offensive to Jews, who in their case are confronted by a story which has no silver lining. For them, this is simply *Shoah* (Job 30:14), which means ultimate perdition, ultimate ruin. In the face of this dilemma, the Hansen proposal for Birkenau seemed

very appropriate. We don't believe that it was appropriate for Auschwitz, which was the site of mainly Polish martyrdom, because there the public expects places to gather, to hold a mass, or to place a wreath. In Birkenau, there is no point in asserting that these people died on behalf of this or that; there is only a need to see—I don't like the word experience—the vastness of the perdition. Slicing through the site, almost arbitrarily monumentalizing accidental ruins, and also allowing these ruins to fall apart, not stabilizing them, not giving the dignity of monumentality to any part of the site, seemed very appropriate.

That was what we wrote in 1994–95. After the book, people asked us what should be done, and so Debórah and I became involved in the site as planning consultants. Now we are dealing with a different situation. We did not consider the fact of mass tourism when we wrote the book. Ideally, we thought a wall should be put around Birkenau, and that people should be allowed to walk, one by one, through the site on a silent journey without monuments, without texts, without other people chatting, without demonstrations. The site is a big void, a *Tell Olam* as the Jews call it, a cursed site where every human action is inappropriate and in some way obscene. But even if the site was legislated, this would be impossible. Auschwitz has between 500,000 and a million visitors a year. Poland is now, I think, the third most visited country in Europe. Busload after busload of tourists come to Auschwitz. Israeli kids are all schlepped there when they are sixteen years old, they go through Birkenau in groups with flags and cameras, they all cry a little, they have demonstrations on the ruins, they symbolically die with the victims and are symbolically resurrected as Israeli citizens ready to join the army. If this continues with the current intensity, in two or three years crematorium II will have largely disappeared. The Treblinka monument, which is very impressive when you are there alone; the Hansen's proposal; or Birkenau as it is now, simply a very large site on which you can wander—these were all devised in the '50s and '60s, when Poland was



behind the Iron Curtain and relatively few people actually visited these sites. They do not address the massive destruction that is caused by visiting tour groups in these very, very fragile sites. Only reinforced concrete can deal with these demands, and at the moment there is nothing like that.

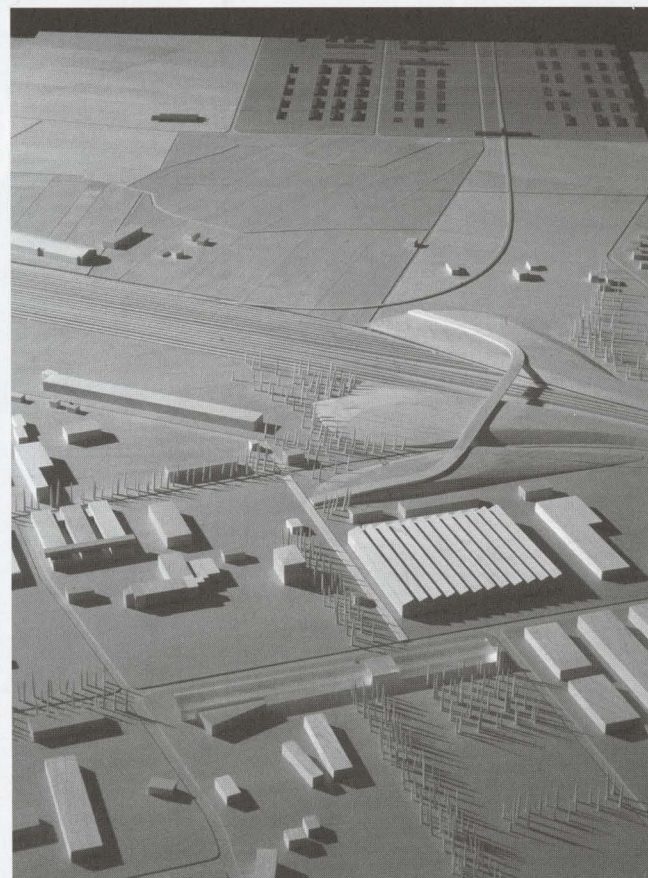
The changing age of the visitors is also a pressing issue. We have a problem with two age groups—young people and old people. It is difficult to take old people through these sites because there are very few facilities for wheelchairs. Toilets are a major problem. Two kilometers into Auschwitz there is nothing but an agreement with guides about places where you can go behind the trees to relieve yourself. It is absurd, but when designing facilities at Auschwitz you need to think of people's prostheses. The challenge is to make the site work as an object of mass tourism without robbing it of what people are seeking there, precisely the silence, the perdition, the *Tell Olam*, the ruin. Ruins are very difficult to maintain, especially amidst a crowd. We face much more difficult practical questions than in the '50s or '60s.

**KH:** You are also considering a new scope of problem. The entire tributary area of Auschwitz comes into your recent considerations, along with ecology of the site, and the economics of community development as Poland joins the western European economies.

**RJ:** The economy of the site hasn't yet been thought through. If any site is set apart from the normal world of economic exchange, it raises the question of who becomes the steward of that site and how people are compensated for their economic losses. In capitalist western Europe, sites of the Holocaust are few and far between. In general they are also small, and the society was rich enough to buy and care for them. Poland has much larger sites, and it is a society which is developing quickly, but that doesn't have a very sophisticated legal system in place to protect historical sites. Under communism, claims of land ownership remained dormant and now there is no easy way to deal with these claims. Birkenau was created by demolishing farms and part of a village, so there are all kinds of claims on the land on which it is built. We have all these unresolved issues, and a community which tries to capitalize on the only thing they have, which is property.

The traditional approach to this problem, imposed by the outside world, is to create boundaries around the camp, zones of exclusion. UNESCO has created a line, and said that within that line, no development may take place. To create a 500-metre zone around the perimeter of the camp and compound, in which nothing can happen is a nice idea, but who is going to pay for that? A farmer who owns land within that boundary—mean only between the barbed wire fence and the boundary—that farmer, can he work his land? Is it in the general interest that agriculture continues? You will say yes, outside the fence, the farmer should continue to

Detail of site model showing the proposed Visitor Reception Centre, Memorial Park and approach to Birkenau. From *Strategy for the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau*, 1997.



work the fields so that it does not become a wilderness. But then you are going to say what do we allow, shall we allow this farmer to use a horse-drawn plough—that's fine, kind of picturesque—but are we allowing him a tractor to work the field, maybe so, but would we allow this farmer to set up a very large pigsty? We might say then that we prefer not, especially in the case of Auschwitz, where the parallel has been made by Heidegger to mechanized agriculture. How do we compensate this person who is held back in an agricultural economy of the '30s? Ultimately somebody has to manage and protect the site, and that has to be a local population; if not them, then we need police to patrol the site. Our epilogue spoke about Polish claims and Jewish claims as absolute claims, historical claims. We did not consider that in all probability, the Poles will be the stewards of the site. Does that give some specific validity to the Polish claim? I don't know. These are the issues we are negotiating.

**KH:** The question of boundaries has a corollary in the question of the centre and how people arrive there. Your present focus is on a new visitors reception centre. Does the extended linear form of your proposal reflect the earlier scheme for Birkenau?

**RJ:** The reception centre is designed as a neutral midpoint along a path. Our proposal has in common with the Hansen proposal the fact that it is not a monument. Our design team would happily see the monument disappear. For us the real issue is to educate people about this complex site, to move from monument to museum. The problem is where to locate the museum and how to define its nature. I think it cannot be a museum of original artifacts because there are in fact very few relics and these are not of a traditional nature. Normally museums were created because people had large quantities of stuff to exhibit. In the case of Auschwitz, most of the stuff produced in the camps was very flimsy—pots and pans of people who were deported to the camps. From the perspective of the original object, it makes a very disappointing exhibition. In Auschwitz, however, you are at the place. I can bring you to where the selection took place. In our book we identified the selection as the most important moment in the whole of the Holocaust. You get to a doctor and the doctor says you go the gas chamber or you go and will live for a little bit longer. It is an amazing caesura, a cut in the continuum of our history as a species. Now the place at the *Rampe* (station platform) where this happened is not indicated. I think that it is good that most people pass that place without ever realizing what happened there. But it is important to have an exhibition which shows that this is where it happened, this is the significance of what happened, and this is why it happened there and not in some other place. If you want, you can go there and discover the place for yourself without an architect having been there to build a monument with an arrow saying this is important. The problem with the existing monument that connects crematorium II and III is that it makes them into appendices of its own importance, while compared to these crematoria it is of no emotional significance whatsoever. If you go to the crematorium, you can actually stand in the gas chambers and you can see the tracks of the carts that ran the corpses into the ovens. That is real. That is what Auschwitz offers. Unlike the Holocaust Museum in Washington or Jad Vashem

in Israel, it is the place where "it happened." You can stand there. Nothing else is needed to justify the trip to that site. Our idea is to bring the visitor reception centre to a neutral point, which we have identified as the factory across the railway corridor. There we can create an educational centre that takes the weight from these objects and from which it is possible to address the very difficult issues of competing claims. We can look at history and find a reconciliation through knowledge. But it is also a place where we can allow commercial activity. It is absolutely unrealistic to have this stream of visitors, which everyone wants because they believe Auschwitz should be visited, and yet to say that we don't want to have gift shops, and we don't want to have McDonald's, and that we don't want to have taxicab drivers trying to get fares, and that we don't want to have a hotel. These are realities of mass tourism. By putting that centre right between Auschwitz and Birkenau, we realize the unspoken potential of the Hansen scheme, which is that it instrumentalizes its own movement through the site.

**KH:** It translates that type of elevated anti-monument into a new kind of anti-monument that accommodates the very real demands of mass tourism.

Ruins of crematoria, Birkenau. Photo: Kenneth Hayes.



**RJ:** That is the only way we can proceed, not only from a theoretical point of view, but from a practical point of view as well. Over many things there are disagreements, but ultimately we can establish the capacity of a bladder. We must start from the parking lots, with the enormously difficult practical problem of how we move thousands of people through this site in a day. Or rather, to be more theoretically correct, how they move themselves. Should there be a shuttle, and where should it run? One of the big problems now is that once people have walked one or two kilometres into the Field of Ashes, they have to walk back. That is quite a journey. One might say that if one is going to visit Auschwitz you shouldn't mind spending an extra hour in your trip to get back to your point of origin, but many people don't have the time or energy for that, and therefore don't even go to the Field of Ashes. It is too far, and so they miss one of the most important



places in the whole site. That is why our scheme proposes a shuttle which will connect the extremities of the site. When one is as far from the parking lot as one wants to go, there will be a place to catch the bus and go back.

**KH:** This also provides some reconciliation of the two camps and the claims that arise from each.

**RJ:** In some way capitalism is the end of ideologies. Once there is a decent infrastructure in place that deals with the site as a whole and that accommodates the vastness of the site, then we will look back on these problems of religious commemoration, of crosses versus Stars of David, as controversies that we don't even understand anymore. The reason people now get upset is that because of the lack of infrastructure, everyone in some way is concentrated, if you will forgive the word, in a few very select spots which have to bear the weight of commemoration. Once the site has been made accessible to all, and the whole of the site has been made accessible, then many different ways of commemoration can be accommodated. Ours is an approach in which the terrain is carefully mapped to aid in the resolution of all these ideas of monument, commemoration and representation.

**KH:** There is a pragmatic reduction of the symbolic values in response to the fact of mass tourism.

**RJ:** We established a three-part distinction between critical, significant and important sites as a flexible tool of negotiation. One of the big problems we face in Auschwitz now is that everything is equally important. Whenever it suits people, they make things important. At one moment it can be the church in the *kommandentour*, the next it is the shopping mall, then it is a farmhouse standing too close to crematorium II, and the next moment it is the Philip Morris factory. Measly things erupt into crises. At a certain moment we should recognize the silliness of this. There are important places, certainly there are critically important places, and there are places that we all have to admit we can negotiate away for the sake of the local community that has to live with this place. The *kommandentour* of Birkenau, for example, has become the parish church of Brzezinka. If you complain to the inhabitants they will point out that it was not completed before the end of the war. They will also say that they have lost their parish church, which was where the camp is now; in fact their whole village was destroyed. They ask if they may not have something back from the site. It is a reasonable argument. At certain moments, someone has to take responsibility to say that certain issues are critical to us, and that we, as Jews, for example, will agree amongst ourselves what is really not negotiable for us. We must then be prepared to put our money where our judgment is. If we are going to claim that something is of critical importance, we have to take responsibility for it. Only then we can ask the Poles to

do the same. It would be great if our judgment and that of the Polish stewards was identical, but of course this will not be the case. Yet this difference gives us the political instruments to negotiate, and to clarify to each other and to ourselves where it is possible to make compromises, and where we should not compromise. One of the sad things is that we have never had these instruments, or have never cared to make them. This leaves us hostage to the next crisis or incident. We never know how to react, since everything connected to the name of Auschwitz is connected to a million dead or six million dead, and is thus non-negotiable. I think that if we sat around a table we could agree amongst ourselves that we could compromise without being compromised.

This relies on education and very practically on how visitors are brought to the site. A large cross, dedicated by the present Polish Pope, now stands close to the wall of Auschwitz. That cross is the object of daily protests by the Poles, who feel that the Jews want to take it away. Now to be very honest, I have no problem with that cross. I say let that cross be there, in a place that very legitimately has a strong relation to the martyrdom of Poles inside. The problem is that all the buses arriving at the present visitors centre pass that cross on their way to the parking lot. All those people who are tense about going to Auschwitz with the idea that this is in some way very important to them as Jews, the first thing they see is a seven-metre-tall cross. How do we deal with that? One way is to ensure that tour buses are not all going to take the road that confronts them with it. The cross is actually out of sight from the route we have proposed. This is an example of how we can address very explosive issues of monuments through infrastructure. We must accept that we operate not only with a very specific history which demands commemoration, but also with a fifty-year postwar history.

**KH:** And with an ongoing present.

**RJ:** Indeed. If the local population cannot see that the site is going to benefit them; if they only see it as an obstacle to their development, then they are not going to take responsibility. At the moment that is the case because no one stays there long enough. There is a practical need to deal with the problems created by large groups of people, but it is also important that large groups of people stay there longer. It is a tightrope: how attractive do you want to make the town of Oswiecim as a place to stay the night? That of course has to do with how the site is developed. If visitors have the feeling that if they have only stayed there one day then they have not seen enough, the idea of an overnight stay, spending some money in town becomes realistic. This gives the local people a stake in the site, which is the most important thing we can achieve.

*Kenneth Hayes is an architectural historian and curator of contemporary art.*

## Wish You Were Here?

### PAUL LAMOTHE'S SUDBURY POSTCARDS

This issue's artist project features two detachable postcards from Paul Lamothe's Sudbury series. Richard William Hill provides the following travelogue...

It's like an analogy question from a surreal I.Q. test: Traci Lords is to Buzz Aldrin as Sudbury is to: \_\_\_\_? Paul Lamothe's series of Sudbury postcards—two of which have been inserted in this issue of FUSE as an artist's project—invite just these sorts of perplexing questions.

Lamothe is building a mythology for a city in which the hard, mundane reality of large-scale industrial mining occasionally spawns events as improbable as the fictions and half-truths his postcards propagate. What else can you say about a place that has built a giant nickel by the side of the Trans-Canada Highway to honour its primary industry? (Batman keeps a giant penny in the Batcave as a trophy, but he has the excuse that he is only a comic-book character).

The nickel industry being thus honoured has, along with logging, famously deforested much of the region. As an added touch, acid rain has left the exposed granite rock surfaces stained black. NASA even sent Apollo astronauts to train around Sudbury because conditions so much resembled the surface of the moon. The city went so far as to erect a monument to the event, a simplified mock-up of the lunar lander that looked part sculpture, part jungle-gym. The object in question is no longer on display. Someone must have realized the dubious propaganda value of officially monumentalizing the region's resemblance to the surface of the moon. Another local landmark is the famous Superstack, a smokestack tall enough to

send its emissions up and away from the local region. This, along with a program to de-acidify the soil and replant some trees, has allowed for a bit of an ecological comeback.

Even Sudbury's geography seems improbably tinged with science fiction. Most experts believe that the Sudbury basin was formed by a massive meteorite impact about two billion years ago. No wonder that the region's blasted industrial landscape has been etched permanently into Lamothe's aesthetic sensibility. He wears it like a badge of

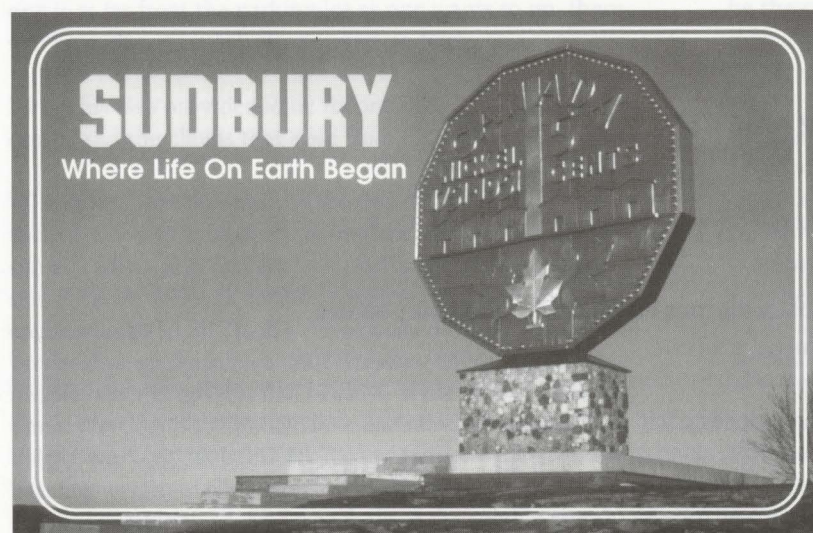
honour, undercut with irony. "I hate Vancouver," he once told me, "I couldn't live there. Too pretty."

Any mythology with a shred of ambition has to have a good origin story. Lamothe's first two postcards are confidently emblazoned: "Sudbury: Where Life on Earth Began." The blurb on the back explains that the prehistoric meteor strike was "the spark that ignited the primordial ooze." A mere two billion years later life has progressed to the point where humanity can put a man on the moon and erect a giant nickel.

Mock Apollo lunar landing vehicle, Sudbury. The Superstack is in the background. Photo courtesy David Hannan.







Giant coins:  
The Big Nickel of Sudbury,  
commemorating the 200th anniversary  
of the discovery of nickel, 1951.  
From a photograph and postcard by  
Paul Lamothe, employed in the exhibi-  
tion "Sprawl," 1997.

Batman's giant penny, from the cover of  
a 1974 DC comic book.



The first two postcards were developed for the exhibition "Sprawl," at Mercer Union (1997). Approximately 700 hundred postcards were mounted on one wall in an alternating zigzag pattern. One set showed an image of the big nickel, the other the Superstack silhouetted against the setting sun. Inset into the latter image, in portrait ovals, are the faces of three celebrities: Apollo 11 astronaut Edwin (Buzz) Aldrin, the first person to be photographed on the moon; Grace Hartman, Sudbury's first female mayor; and former porn star Traci Lords. Ironically it is Lords who has proven to be the most recognizable of the three.

The connection to Sudbury is clear in the case of the first two personalities, but, you might ask, "Is Traci Lords from

Sudbury?" Lamothe would likely answer, "Sure, didn't you know? We went to the same high school." He would be lying of course, but you might not realize that at first. After all, it doesn't seem entirely unlikely; Sudbury is a place to come from, a place you leave to become famous. Lords may not have actually been to Sudbury in person, but these days isn't that just a technicality? Surely she has been the star of many a Sudburian's furtive home-video screenings. Besides, this is the Sudbury of art and myth. Lamothe is going to populate it with whomever he likes.

In a way Aldrin, Hartman and Lords make up a kind of dysfunctional family unit. As parents, Aldrin and Hartman represent two very different but equally optimistic

promises: unlimited technological achievement and women's liberation. They are quaint representatives of a time—Lamothe's childhood—when the world seemed to be anywhere but at the end of history. Lords, who is the artist's age, is the dream gone bad, its repressed underside. She is the bad-girl daughter who lost her innocence too young (while retaining the possibility of redemption—she is famous not so much as a pornstar, but as a *former* pornstar).

Lamothe's most recent postcard, *Moon Rocks*, plays more directly on Sudbury's connection to the Apollo program. Created for the exhibition "The Sudbury Basin: Industrial Topographies," at the Art Gallery of Sudbury (1999), it is also shown in a wall-mounted form. The dark postcards alternate in a checkerboard pattern with spaces of blank wall painted a medium gray. The card shows a hostile, rocky landscape with a black sky. A grid of small black crosses (familiar as registration marks on lunar photos) overlays the scene, along with the text "Moon Rocks," written in a ghostly silver/gray font of the sort you might find on the cover of a 1970s science fiction novel. This is not the surface of the moon, but Sudbury with a (surprisingly little) bit of help from Photoshop. The image is evocative: don't we all revisit our home towns as astronauts of sorts? As in Lamothe's postcards, aren't the key feelings an unsettling simultaneous combination of familiarity and dislocation? It is the seductive pleasure of nostalgia come up against the hard reality of loss: the passage of time, the changes in oneself that have occurred away from home. Comfort—feeling at home somewhere—always seems on some level to indicate a failure of imagination. Dislocation, however difficult, provides the opportunity to regard the apparently familiar in a new way. In other words, to establish the conditions for art.

Richard William Hill is a writer and artist.

## UNSETTLING SIGHTS...

### The Lesbian National Parks and Services

LORRI MILLAN AND SHAWNA DEMPSEY  
PERFORMANCE AT BANFF NATIONAL PARK, 1997

REVIEW BY MARGOT FRANCIS

In the Lesbian National Parks and Services (LNPS), performance artists Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan *queery* the mythic figure of the Canadian Park Ranger and the (hetero)sexual assumptions that shape the scripts for travel. Dempsey and Millan performed the LNPS project on the streets of Banff for three weeks during the summer of 1997.<sup>1</sup> However, when I interviewed Dempsey last fall, she provided a description of the project that went well beyond its obvious Queer intent, suggesting the lesbian rangers provided an opportunity to "explore hetero-normative male whiteness and its authority over the outdoors."<sup>2</sup>

This is a complicated set of aspirations and I wondered how they actually played out. How did the citizens of Banff respond as our intrepid rangers travelled the main streets of the town handing out brochures, helping tourists and staging specific events like the LNPS recruitment table in the town park? After all, this was Alberta (!) and the artists did employ a hyperbolic display of the word *lesbian* on the cover of their brochures. Also, the pair lost no opportunity to parody the commodification of Banff in their handily respatialized map on the inside cover of the brochure. Here, actual tourist sites were combined with virtual institutions like the "Invisible Lesbian Heritage House and Gardens" and the "Invisible Plaque Dedicated to our Founding Foremothers."

It seemed that Dempsey's pithy phrase captured the possibility that whiteness and Queerness were both essential components of the project. The LNPS project

seemed to pose whiteness and Queerness in a campy embrace. Implicit in the rangers Queer subversions was the constitutive power of whiteness—and this was the very contradiction that provided the sense of irony, contrast and surprise that made the project work.

In Banff, the lesbian rangers worked in a kind of subterfuge: they were "private investigators," undercover in the public space of a tourist mecca investigating tourism's hidden assumptions and costs.<sup>3</sup> But, who can go undercover? In a country where non-white citizens are always *really* from somewhere else, the artists' ability to perform as private investigators in public space was itself reliant on whiteness. I was curious to explore how the notion of being undercover in the wilderness worked precisely because it employed and subverted the idea of those oh-so-reassuring rangers. In this context, the campy image on the front of the LNPS brochure—with its hyperbolic display of *lesbian*—had as its necessary contrast the "benign," white body of the ranger.

Commentators like Kobena Mercer suggest that white people "colonize the definition of normal" and in so doing, mask whiteness itself as a category.<sup>4</sup> Richard Dyer has argued that whiteness is often seen to be everything and nothing—everywhere but never spoken. In popular films, both whiteness and masculinity have been characterized by the idea of "boundariness."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the sense of benign goodness associated with park rangers relies on the notion that

they are engaged in legitimate forms of white, male boundary maintenance: the patrol of national parks. This boundariness is the necessary backdrop, forming the "good citizen" to which the unbounded and outrageously campy lesbian is contrasted.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, rangers are not only employed in maintaining park boundaries. They've also taken over the labour of preserving and interpreting the wildlife—skills practiced by the aboriginal inhabitants. As Kyo Maclear comments, many of us have been semilogically trained during grade school trips to Algonquin Park to see rangers as "our friends."<sup>7</sup> However the boundaries of national parks and the skills of the naturalist/rangers were only established as "white" when aboriginal claims to the same territory and skills were discredited. Notions of "scientific racism" were crucial to judging aboriginal people as unfit to claim territory (in Banff and elsewhere) on which they had lived, and exercised the skills later to be associated with naturalists, for generations.<sup>8</sup> This is precisely the contradictory axis on which the LNPS project turns: Queer subversions gain their punch and legitimacy from the benign boundariness associated with park rangers.

If the park rangers served as the "respectable" foil for a "degenerate" sexuality to infiltrate public space, how did the *lesbian* subversions operate in Dempsey and Millan's day-to-day performances, brochure and field reports? In addition to the queerly respatialized map



"Recruitment Table," from The Lesbian National Parks and Services performance, Banff, 1997. Photo courtesy the artists and The Banff Centre.



described above, the artists created a slew of campy puns that mimicked, mocked and recycled dominant ideas. For instance, in the section of the brochure titled: *Answers to Frequently Asked Questions*, one reads: *Are some animals particularly dangerous?* The answer:

Four legged lesbian herbivores are apt to rut frequently, throughout all four seasons. Be they elk, moose, mountain sheep or goats, lesbians are powerful beasts who are unhappy to be interrupted.

Similarly, under the heading of *Flora and Fauna* the brochure reads:

We at Lesbian National Parks and Services like to think of Flora and Fauna as two women in a long term relationship. They've had their ups and downs, but really they are most

vulnerable to damage by outside forces.... So, while you are at the park today take the time to look around, and question the heterosexual model. Ask yourself what is "nature." Ask yourself what is "natural." And please, be careful not to step on any lesbians.

Here the artists appropriate the "natural" landscape of Banff to question the basis on which some sexualities are seen as natural while others are deviant. From the perspective of the LNPS, lesbians do not simply have a right to exist, they are an important resource. As the artists suggest in their tongue-in-cheek final report:

Despite the challenges encountered by our first field team, the Rangers succeeded in establishing a beach-head in the heterosexual wilderness. We feel the team's approach (exploiting rampant consumerism as

a model by which to achieve explosive homo growth) will be studied for years to come... it seems possible that within this framework, the introduction of homosexual species indigenous to the area might lead to expedient multiplication, transforming the gay-wasteland-that-is-Banff into a Virtual Galapagos of homosexual wildlife.<sup>9</sup>

Dempsey and Millan write as undercover naturalists who reverse everyday preoccupations with "degeneracy" and direct their critical gaze at *hetero* sexual space. Not to be outdone by the "het" consumer model, the artists appropriate it to foster "explosive homo growth" while in the same moment satirizing the commodification of Banff.

Throughout all the LNPS brochures, reports and performances, Dempsey and

Millan inhabit the booming voice of the (white, male) 1950s "expert"—and use it for their own ends. But never have we heard an expert talk about the desirability of achieving "explosive homo growth." The norm is quite the reverse as the scope of institutions which prevent the development of gay people is unimaginably large: education, law, the church, medicine, the military and most aspects of mass culture enforce heterosexuality all but unquestioningly.

Unlike many other activists who are challenging sexual regulation, the Lesbian National Parks and Services project does not simply rely on the tactics of assimilation or apologetics regarding the gay lifestyle. Instead, from the ironic references to the "Invisible Museum of Homosexual Mountain History" to the current directives to "go forth and multiply," their performance presents an explicit argument that lesbian lives are, not simply tolerable, but *desirable*.

This appropriation of a national icon for "deviant" purposes blurred the boundaries of the real for even the most knowing observers. Writer and cultural critic Kyo Maclear was at Banff in the summer of 1997 for an Arts Journalism residency and had a chance to observe the rangers, from the cafeteria to the streets of the town. In her "eyewitness account" she comments:

It is amazing, but I have yet to see them out of uniform or off duty.... Gradually the surrogate rangers are becoming ever more real, ever more familiar... the conceptual satire seems to have titillated visitors (myself included) to the point that we have become willing participants in a masquerade. Are we falling prey to parody? Or is the fiction unravelling the real, its centre and margins.... The LNPS make it clear that the social scripts, determining who will be

loved, hated and revered, can be easily scrambled. Identities can be cross-wired and reprogrammed because they are based on unstable attributes.<sup>10</sup>

Here, whiteness remains a stable background while the *Lesbian* in the rangers' insignia reminds us that park rangers, and other national icons, are only imaginable as straight. These Queer ideas highlight the force of heteronormativity in the imagination of the wilderness, at the same time as the visitors "titillation" signals the instability of these same (hetero)sexual assumptions.

Perhaps the practical connections between Queerness and whiteness come most clearly into view in the LNPS recruitment drive, described in "Field Report No. 56" of the project. The report outlines a performance in the Banff town park, where Dempsey and Millan calmly attempted to recruit all manner of people, including children, into the ranger program. Ranger Dempsey provides a wry set of notes on their performance:

Today's recruitment drive was very successful. The colourful "Lesbian National Parks and Services WANTS YOU!" banner and the pink lemonade attracted countless passersby, who were most interested in the Service and how they might become involved. Among our more animated guests was a day camp of thirty thirsty children who were very excited by our Junior Ranger programmes. (On a personal note I must say it is extremely satisfying to have eager young faces look up at our crisply uniformed selves with naked awe and respect.)<sup>11</sup>

Anyone who has ever been involved in anti-homophobia work in schools, or human rights work on lesbian, gay or bisexual issues cannot fail to be aston-

ished by this.<sup>12</sup> Here the accusation levelled at educators is always that our *real* agenda is indeed: recruitment. In constructing a LNPS recruitment table, the artists tackle these fears head-on. So how did they pull it off—and particularly in Alberta?

Perhaps some thoughts on "tourism" would be important to understanding what might have happened. Commentators have argued that Banff is one of the ultimate sites of Canadian tourism's objectifying gaze. While many tourists remark that they want to see "something a little different," the success of most tourism enterprise rests on ensuring that differences "do not disturb" or, at least that the spectacle is manageable and predictable for the consumer.<sup>13</sup>

I would suggest that perhaps tourists consumed the spectacle of the LNPS recruitment table as an incidence of manageable, albeit risky, difference. Certainly, one of the key reasons for this was the space in which the recruitment table was located: the wide open arena of a park. The "rules of engagement" are far different in parks, than—for example, schools. In a park, one can imagine tourists taking in the spectacle of a recruiting table and banner as just one more, albeit unusual, difference. While most could just veer in the other direction with "no harm" to the children, others could avail themselves of some lemonade, even chat with the "girls" and then move on.<sup>14</sup>

Importantly, the rangers' image of innocence, reminiscent of Girl Guides (or, Boy Scouts) only works for a majority white audience when it is materialized through whiteness, specifically Dempsey and Millan's white female bodies.<sup>15</sup> Girl Guides, park rangers and many other icons can only be seen as benign, normative symbols if they are racialized as "just people," which, in a Canadian



context, representations of people of colour have never been.<sup>16</sup>

There are very specific kinds of displacement that mark the histories of people of colour in and around the Rockies and it is only our forgetfulness of these legacies that makes the commodification of Banff possible. Kyo Maclear writes:

Without leaping into the archives, how are Banff initiates to know that the land they walk on is part of a Siksika Nation land claim ... that the Rockies served as a physical and symbolic border for Japanese Canadians who [after their internment during World War II] were not allowed west of the mountains until the late 1940s ... that the peaks are unmarked graves for Chinese railroad labourers who died in the thousands? We turistas are encouraged to be flat broke on thought, dizzy on scenery ... stone[d] on beauty and apathy.<sup>17</sup>

It is precisely our erasure of these racialized histories that haunts the visual repertoire informing Banff's present. Indeed one of the few place names that references Chinese Canadians near Banff is a mountain called "Chinaman's Peak." Maclear notes that the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation Board has conceded to arguments that the name is racist and disparages the memory of those men who built the most dangerous sections of the railway.<sup>18</sup> Yet the upcoming name change is cold comfort when this remains one of the only references to Chinese Canadians in the Rockies.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the original story associated with "Chinaman's Peak" is itself revealing. As the authors of *Place Names of the Canadian Alps* recount, the name was given by local residents "because a miner of Chinese origin, inspired by a wager, was the first person to ascend it." Rumour has it, they tell us "that he was disbelieved upon his return and so made

a second ascent, this time constructing a cairn more visible from Canmore."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps these small changes simply tell us that this process of historical remembering has barely scratched the surface.

At the beginning of this article I wondered about the practices of viewing that visitors to Banff might have used when they encountered the lesbian rangers. According to the project curator Kathryn Walter, the response was "relatively respectful" and the rangers were regarded with "more awe than suspicion."<sup>21</sup> I would suggest that if the artists associated with the LNPS had not been white, their performance would have been received with less equanimity. Threatening, perverse or inscrutable, it's hard to say, but whatever the effect, non-white artists would not have been able to draw on a "benign" visual repertoire of national icons in anything like the same manner.

The LNPS relied on the figure of the benign, white park ranger for the sense of legitimacy and contrast necessary to make the Queer subversions, which were the main focus of the project, work. Indeed as Dempsey suggested, although the focus of the LNPS was not on "whiteness," it did provide an opportunity to observe its legitimating effects. This analysis speaks to the tensions which fuel artistic practice and structure its contradictory meanings, at the same time asking that observers tour "the wilderness" with more attention to the relations of power which might fracture the view.<sup>22</sup> It also suggests that viewers reassess any simple attachment to an obvious "message," and explore how benign notions of white dominance might structure the gaze while these very operations are hidden from view.

In the LNPS, Dempsey and Millan used camp to perform a kind of mimicry that

suggests simultaneous resemblance and menace, working on-and-against the dominant culture from within. They recycle the icon of Canadian Park Ranger for purposes that are feminist and Queer affirmative, seducing us with a performance that is outrageous, impure, and—with all its hilarious and troubling associations—very Canadian.

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#### Notes

1. The LNPS was part of a series of site-specific performances curated by Kathryn Walter at a summer institute at the Banff Centre for the Arts. The book/catalogue chronicling these performances is *Private Investigators: Undercover in Public Space*, available by mail order from the Banff Centre Press by calling (403) 762-7532. Dempsey and Millan also performed the LNPS at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in August 1999.
2. Shawna Dempsey, interview with the author, 16 November 1998.
3. Kyo Maclear, "The Accidental Witness," in *Private Investigators: Undercover in Public Space*, essays by Kathryn Walter and Kyo Maclear (Banff, Alberta: WPG Editions, Banff Centre Press, 1999), p. 10.
4. Quoted from the video *Being White*, by Tony Dowmunt, Maris Clark, Rooney Martin and Kobena Mercer, Albany Video, London.
5. Richard Dyer, "White," in *Screen* 29, no. 4, fall 1988, p. 51. Dyer elaborates, "[t]he importance of the process of boundary establishment and maintenance has long been recognized in discussions of stereotyping and representation. This process is functional for dominant groups, but through it the capacity to set boundaries becomes a characteristic attribute of such groups, endlessly reproduced in ritual, costume, language and, in cinema, mise-en-scène. Thus, whites and men (especially) become characterized by 'boundariness.'"

6. There is a double movement here: the icon of Park Ranger constitutes the respectable citizen and also engages in forms of surveillance that produce "respectable" norms of citizenship. Thanks to Darien Taylor for these observations.

7. Kyo Maclear, "Eyewitness Account," *Private Investigators: Undercover in Public Space*, op. cit., p. 56.

8. Kent McNeil, "Social Darwinism and Judicial Conceptions of Indian Title in the 1880s," in *Journal of the West* 38, no. 1, January 1999, pp. 68-76.

9. Rangers Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, "Final Report," in *Private Investigators: Undercover in Public Space*, op. cit., p. 55.

10. Maclear, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

11. Ranger Shawna Dempsey, "Field Report No. 56," *Private Investigators: Undercover in Public Space*, op. cit., p. 52.

12. Alberta still has not recognized or included sexual orientation in the provincial statute on human rights.

13. Holly Baines, *Overlapping/Contesting Representations: Tourism and Native Indian Canadians*, MA thesis, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 1995, p. 67.

14. While outside the scope of this article, it would be interesting to reflect on the effects that might have ensued if the rangers had been Queer men. Representations of lesbians have tended to desexualize them, while gay men are often thought of as hypersexual. A Queer male parody of the iconic Canadian Park Rangers would likely have been seen as monstrously and inappropriately sexual, recapitulating exactly the stereotypes that already serve to constitute gay male bodies. Thanks to Darien Taylor for the insight that prompted these observations.

15. In Banff the tourist audience is predominately white. The majority of tourists, in order of the volume, come from the United States, England and Japan.

16. The white supremacist legacy of Canada's immigration policy is only the most obvious example of this kind of racialization.

17. Maclear, "The Accidental Witness," op. cit., p. 10. Emphasis in the original.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

19. The peak will be renamed after the Chinese Canadian mountaineer who is the first on record



Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, Banff, 1997.  
Photo: Donald Lee, The Banff Centre.

to have climbed it.

20. W.L. Putnam, G.W. Boles and R.W. Laurilla, *Place Names of the Canadian Alps* (Revelstoke, B.C.: Footprint Publishing, 1990), p. 56.

21. Kathryn Walter, "Lesbian National Parks and Services: Scenario," *Private Investigators: Undercover in Public Space*, op. cit., p. 46.

22. I want to make it clear that I am *not* arguing that artistic production is only "genuinely subversive" when it explicitly challenges every dominant norm (racism, homophobia, class bias, ablist...). This kind of prescription will only strangle artistic creativity and produce work which is predictable, "safe" and appallingly dull.



# TOUCH : TOUCHÉ

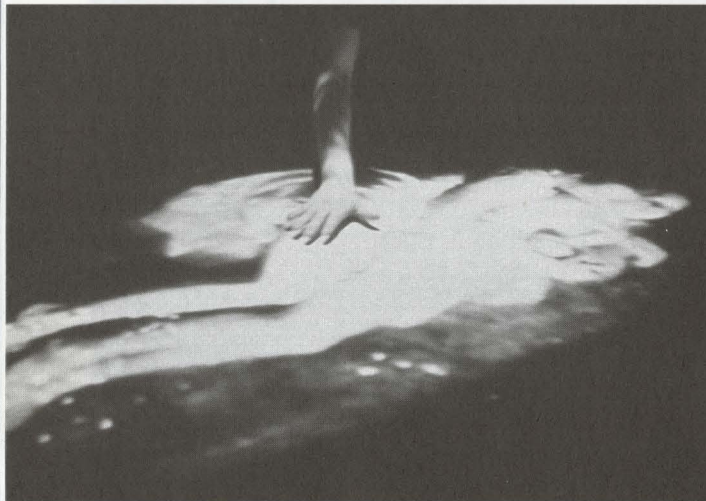
THECLA SCHIPHORST AND DANIEL JOLLIFFE  
CURATED BY NINA CZEGLÉDY  
OBORO, MONTREAL, MARCH 6–APRIL 3, 1999  
MACKENZIE ART GALLERY, REGINA, NOVEMBER 19, 1999–JANUARY 19, 2000

REVIEW BY MARCUS MILLER

"Interactivity is the first commandment in the religion of new media" (Calin Dan in the catalogue for "Touch : Touché"). The very fact that the promise of "interactivity" is invoked so insistently (even desperately) whenever new media is presented, seems cause enough for suspicion. If a new relationship really is emerging

No passive contemplation here—you must actually pull Daniel Jolliffe's cart around the room to activate its projection mechanism, and touch Thecla Schiphorst's projection-screen-table to roll through the various visual and audio sequences that have been prerecorded.

Schiphorst is something of a multimedia darling right now. A few years ago, she was profiled in *Wired* magazine. Trained as a dancer, she studied computer science and developed an animation and choreographic computer-tool called *Life Forms*. For more than seven years, she worked with the great modern dancer/choreographer Merce Cunningham.



*Body Maps*, Thecla Schiphorst, installation detail, 1999.

between viewer and viewed (some would claim even these monologic distinctions are outmoded), then why all the hype—shouldn't it all be a tad more self-evident?

Two beautifully executed works presented last year at Oboro solicit and depend on the bodily engagement of viewers. In fact, when one first walks into the darkened spaces of the gallery (does interactivity always depend on dimming the house lights?), an attendant rushes out to inform you that traditional prohibitions have been lifted and "please, by all means...."

*Bodymaps: artifacts of touch* is a table that sits in the middle of a darkened room with eight speakers suspended overhead. By touching the white velour surface, noises are triggered, and moving images of a woman (the artist?) in various vulnerable and fetal positions are projected. A uneasy, paranoid feeling permeates the room as you stand around the table poking, rubbing and feeling the projection surface. Is anyone watching, or is it just me—watching? Or am I touching?

Leaving aside the question of voyeurism, it's certainly appropriate that an "interac-

tive" experience blur the boundaries between touching and seeing. Promoters of virtuality and Cyberia would no doubt be tickled pink with this conflation, but what's really going on when you see the girl and touch the screen? The girl is offered up for your eyes, and the mechanical/interactive contingencies of the situation demand a feel. Drunk with desire (both for the girl, and to move on to the next sequence), your hand shoots out in anticipated consummation, only to be met with a hard, flat surface. The soft nap of the velour can't possibly make up for the absent flesh, and so ... well, take a cold shower.

This is not touch: it is merely the image of touch. Rather than tapping into a broader range of sensibilities: recuperating a rounder, fuller experience that doesn't privilege the visual—this work actually fetishizes it. It functions like an impostor, never delivering on its promise. But why should it? Consumers have never had any problem with fetish.

"High tech" is where-the-money-is, and "interactivity" is one of the mantra/slogans used to pump the market. It's a constant source of amazement and disappointment to some that artists don't seem to be any more thoughtful or critical than anyone else in gulping down the hype. Yes Big Brother, seeing is believing.

Marcus Miller is an artist who recently presented work in the "Moving and Storage" exhibition in Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto. He is the art critic for the *Hour* Newspaper in Montreal, and artistic director of the *Saw* Gallery in Ottawa.

# OHM: DANCE THROUGH AN ELECTRIC EYE

DIRECTED BY ED SINCLAIR AND KAREN KEW  
PRODUCED BY ELIZA HADDAD IN ASSOCIATION WITH BRAVO!  
CHOREOGRAPHED BY VIV MOORE  
BROADCAST ON BRAVO!, 20 SEPTEMBER, 1999 AND JANUARY 3, 2000

REVIEW BY MICHAEL BALSER

*Electric spinal cord weaves through cities carrying the eyes of so many faces. Flesh and wire tangle and fuse while up above giant billboard people peer down.* —OHM

Film and video have a history of multidisciplinary collaboration, performance documents and numerous elusive hybrids. Dance for the camera is one of the ways in which video artists have been able to negotiate a space in the world of broadcast television. The intersection of the modern with the postmodern (dance with media art) is a convergence that seems to make television executives feel comfortable with the more esoteric strategies employed in much artists' video and film. By now, television audiences are familiar with dance documentaries, both ballet and modern, and performances set in theatrical spaces with cameras rigidly targeting the stage; the craft of the film artist however, remains invisible to them.

In the land of collaboration, video and film artists, dancers and musicians have found a niche in the contemporary media world that has been acknowledged in virtually all venues—museums, galleries, festivals and indeed, television. The visual impact of the human form, in a frame, in motion, often eclipses the formal qualities that the media artist has brought to the work. Short attention spans for dance on television are often exacerbated by the extreme overexposure we have to the armies of Paula Abdul-esque choreographed dancers that have become a staple of music video. Everybody is dancing across the musical



Video stills from *Ohm: Dance Through an Electric Eye*, Ed Sinclair and Karen Kew, 1999, video and 16mm, 21.5 min. Courtesy of the artists and Bravo!.

television screen, twenty-four hours a day—often for no apparent reason.

There still remains, of course, the challenge for artists to deliver content, form, performance and entertainment value to get their work to some sector of the broadcast audience. Attempting to calculate the viewing response to the arts on television is pointless—there are no ratings or demographics. Consequently, artists are left to their own devices when attempting to calculate their audience, particularly at the level of national broadcast. What are the limits? What is the compromise?

Born from a series of intensive collaborations, Toronto artists Ed Sinclair and Karen Kew have created *OHM: Dance Through An Electric Eye*. This film, produced with a licensing agreement from Bravo!, will be broadcast periodically

beginning in September 1999. Since 1994, Sinclair and Kew have produced several independent mediaworks including *Kung Fu Karaoke*, and *The Internal World of Cherry Chan*. These works explore the themes of bodies in space, identities, alienation and displacement. The tapes share many qualities, specifically a remarkable ability to draw together narrative fragments by seamless visual effects and editorial structure—the poetic and the techno blending in a visual dance.

*OHM* begins by introducing a series of "characters" of unknown origin and several urban locations—a streetcar traveling at hypnotic speeds through Toronto, a downtown laundromat, an intersection. A group of women attempt to negotiate some sort of deal through preverbal "burps," "clicks" and "ahs," while clapping out the rhythms of their struggle. Another woman does laundry. Her futile





attempts to organize her life and the obsessive churning motion of the machines overcome her. She transports her mind to a less mechanical environment, a garden where her body spins freely. Another group of people are having a hypernormal day on the streetcar. The vehicle is transporting them out of the banal and into the blue. As the travellers break out of their alienated states and begin to communicate with one another,

the streetcar seems to derail or crash in beautiful, sepia-toned slow-motion. The passengers roll and tumble across each other in Twyla Tharp-like choreography. In spite of their inability to communicate, a connection is forced.

The electricity, power and intensity of the city drives the narratives forward. Through all this, there is a sound collage that further shapes the narratives.

Collected from recorded conversations with the participants in the tape, the choreographer, the directors, the writer and others speak openly about their experiences arriving in Toronto. The usual clichés are heard—it's a cold city, it's hard to meet people, it's lonely, etc. Albeit true, these statements are like chants from those who are recent arrivals in the city. *OHM* uses repetition and aural collage to shape the clichés into a work of poetry. These documentary audio fragments provide a personal backdrop—emotional moments not to be taken lightly. The camera and editor create a composite urban space that justifies the apprehensions of the voices we hear repeated in the soundtrack. The lives of all these stock characters are inextricably connected by some unseen spine-tingling wire.

*OHM* is one of the first projects I have seen that uses the latest technology to successfully craft a mediawork that deftly weaves desktop and industrial technology with video/audio strategies of artists' film and video. *OHM* is a primer in convergence—shot on film, digital processing, non-linear editing, desktop audio processing and created by a local community of artist-collaborators at an artist-run centre. I have to admit that several years ago I had my doubts that any of this would come together: that the independent media arts community would last long enough to get access to the newest technology and do ground-breaking projects with it. Ed Sinclair and Karen Kew have entered that territory and with the artists of their generation we may hope to see a new convergence of the arts, technology and television.

*Michael Balser is an artist, writer and curator working in digital media. His fictocriticism has been published in FUSE, Lola and METRO: Chronicles In the First Person. He is currently working on several digital projection works and videotapes, and developing a television series entitled "The Flashback."*

## WASTE MANAGEMENT

TOM FRIEDMAN, GERMAINE KOH, MICHAEL LANDY, DANIEL OLSON, SANDRA RECHICO, JOE SCANLAN, DAVID SHRIGLEY, KELLY WOOD  
CURATED BY CHRISTINA RITCHIE  
ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO, TORONTO, APRIL 7–JULY 11, 1999

REVIEW BY DANA SAMUEL

Reduce, reuse, recycle—at a cursory glance, this is what is happening at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in "Waste Management." In fact, the show is not at all an eco-political monologue about recycling. Recycling implies creating something new and useful out of things whose use value has been expended. The artists in "Waste Management" prove that "use value" is a relative term and that, in fact, many of these objects are only beginning to see their full use potential. Many of the works build off the tradition of the ready-made but seem to take it one step further. Rather than just displaying the everyday object, they transform it in some way, challenging our ideas about waste and use. These transformations reflect a broader cultural shift away from such binaries as useful/useless. This is a shift away from the modern and toward a new economy of labour, leisure and consumption. The art that has been created for "Waste Management" is clearly a product of this new economy and also a critique of the institutions and binarisms of modernism.

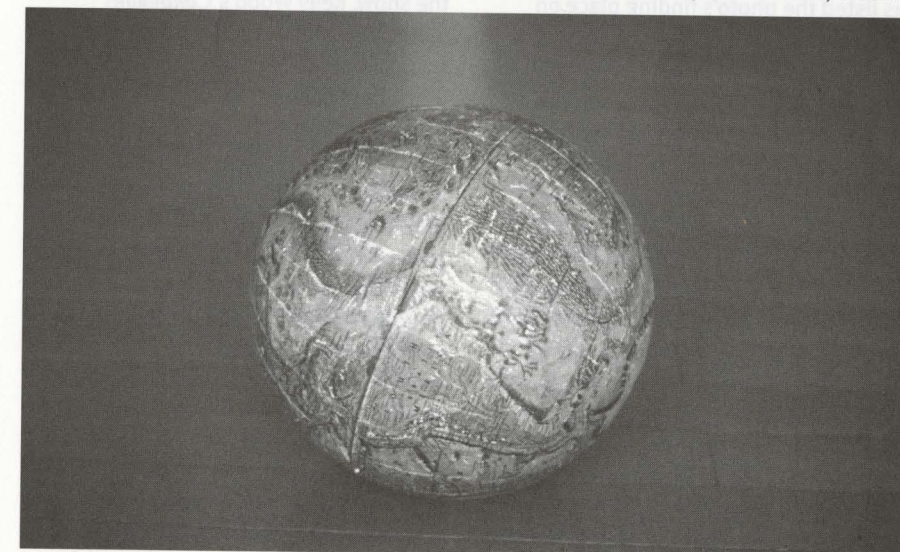
Germaine Koh's works for the show use the Duchampian found object in entirely new ways. In *Knitwork*, Koh unravels knitwear found in thrift shops and reknits the yarn into an outrageously long scarf-like object. A little pile of pullovers and scarves sits in one corner of the space, while the long knitwork sprawls over the floor, bunched up even in its expansiveness. The sweaters are originally often solid colours, but once reknit, the new object is both exalting and repulsive in its technicolour. Each item of clothing was

individual unto itself with a clearly defined use—gloves for your hands, a sweater for your upper body. The new object is a collective garment. Where it is from or what it is for is entirely unclear. The individual items had an integrity of composition. Unraveled and reconstructed, they become a surface area, every inch of the item is exposed in its final form. It is unclear how any of these colour blocks could have once been unitary objects. *Knitwork* looks like the colour map that a disk utility on your computer might have if your hard drive was fragmented, showing the scattered categories of files. Koh's new handknit object stands against much of the Third World mass-produced clothing we find today—whether in thrift shops, or brand new. Our unskilled labour force no longer consists

of the industrial worker, but the service worker. The manufacturing process, moved to the Third World because of cheap labour, is brought back to North America as a labour of love. The archive of old garments is reorganized for a new world order. And within the museum space, Koh's project becomes a highly (dis)ordered archive within an archive, created with a self-conscious relationship to art history and to the museum. A heap of fragments, *Knitwork* lays bare the museum's myth of homogeneity and of ever classifying the "bric-a-brac." Her approach to history echoes Foucault's, that we look deeper than the smooth surface and seek out the disruptions.

Koh's other archive in the show is also one of discontinuity. Her work, *Sightings*,

*A Sad and Beautiful World*, Daniel Olson, 1996, globe with concealed battery-operated mechanism, 30 cm. Photo courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario.







*Knitwork*, Germaine Koh, ongoing since 1992, unraveled used garments with photo and text documentation. Photo courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

deals with discard. She has found castoff snapshots, which the photographers have chosen to edit out of their photo albums to create their own smooth fictions, and turned them into picture postcards. Postcards are normally purchased as an index of where you've traveled. Koh has listed the photo's finding place on the back as a marker to where she has visited. In turn, the viewer can purchase the cards for one dollar each as a souvenir of the gallery visit. *Sightings* takes private data, the family "snapshot gone bad," and makes it public. One of the cards shows a woman sunbathing topless—an image most likely not originally intended for public use. Additionally, the postcards operate as simulacrum, in the sense that they are representations of photos we have probably already seen or taken ourselves. The photos are blurry, poorly composed and lacking any so-called artistic vision. Who hasn't had a roll of film not turn out, or taken goofy photos just for the heck of it? Koh's

you're not allowed to touch it!) Tacky, touristy souvenirs, Koh's archive of postcards takes our "useless" castoffs and gives them a renewed use for the gallery tourist.

Germaine Koh is not the only archivist in the show. Kelly Wood's *Continuous Garbage Project* is literally an archive of trash. Wood decided to photograph her garbage on a daily basis for a total of five years (her first year's worth is on view in the show). Wood declares that trash, as archive, can be art. And like Koh, she questions ideas about the modern versus postmodern museum. Her photographs are of objects that she herself has deemed useless. She is saving these items from their final fate in only the record of a photograph before they are dumped by the curb and carted off by city workers. In this "continuous" project, there are so many curious discontinuities. Envelopes from galleries, mountains of Starbucks cups and possibly

more shoes than Imelda Marcos, Wood's trash is emblematic of our consumer economy. Desire is aroused but never satisfied. The work also hints at ideas of the confusion between public versus private space. Our culture is paranoid to throw anything out that may contain personal information—credit card bills, bank receipts: these are not for public consumption. And yet Wood turns all eyes on the trash with its see-through bags, urging us to peer carefully inside and see what she has been consuming. And she has been consuming a lot.

And so have all the artists in "Waste Management" been consuming—the theme is deceptively environmental. Far from a didactic display, the work in the show is whimsical and inventive. But the work also points out our complicity in this new economy. It might have been very easy to shake a finger or two at child factory labour in the early part of the century, since the offenders were only the few factory owners. But now it is next to impossible not to play a part in the ills of industry, when every day we buy more coffee, more shoes, more knit sweaters. In a way, the work exhibited implicates us all and takes some of the guilt away in acknowledging our shared part in the waste. As art objects, these pieces go beyond the traditional objects of art history. One work by Tom Friedman (*Untitled*) is a self-contained sculpture using plastic drinking straws and a cup, in which the straws spiral out from the centre of the cup to form a donut-like shape. I've seen the show twice now, and on my second viewing, the work itself was gone and there was a sign saying the work was removed in order to preserve it. It is collapsing because of the mass. How does a museum deal with an artwork that can barely stand two months of being on display? Maybe it doesn't matter, since it's just trash anyway.

Dana Samuel is a Toronto-based writer and artist.

## MOVING AND STORAGE

IAN CARR-HARRIS, ANDREW FORSTER, MARK GOMEZ, VERA GREENWOOD, GWEN MCGREGOR, MARCUS MILLER, INEKE STANDISH, RICHARD PURDY  
IN SITU IN OTTAWA, MONTREAL AND TORONTO  
ORGANIZED BY VERA GREENWOOD AND INEKE STANDISH, WITH AN ESSAY BY SYLVIE FORTIN

REVIEW BY STEPHEN HORNE

Sharing a site with all manner of everyday excess: stored files, motorcycle parts and not quite retro furniture, "Moving and Storage" is an exhibition of works by eight artists. The location of the Montreal venue, National Moving and Storage, was a concrete expanse gridded into alleys and cubicles. With map in hand I negotiated the numbered spaces, discovering one by one the eight dispersed works of art in their respective storage lockers, each being about fifteen square metres in floor area.

At least initially, this out-of-gallery exhibition appears to be concerned with issues of installation art, even though the artists here did not undertake a conceptualization of the exhibition site, but preferred to respond to the psychological or material dimension of the space (Mark Gomez), and in some cases to deny the empirical site (Richard Purdy). Nonetheless, this was not necessarily a criteria of their success or failure as individual works. In *Whatever*, Gwen McGregor located a video screening of the TV series "The Prisoner" within a storage container, the walls of which were entirely lined with photo snapshots. The work's impact was primarily psycho/social, reflecting as it did the sense of claustrophobia occasioned by media surveillance. This was a typical situation for many of the artists, including Marcus Miller's disturbing self-portrait as electro-machine-head, *i-Markus*, which responded to the ambience of the space, its desolation and prison-like placelessness. Vera Greenwood's *No Fixed Address* focused on



*Untitled*, Mark Gomez, 1999.

the act of seeing and possessing; a large cube crate filled the room and presented only peepholes. Initially a surprising experience, viewing into the peepholes allows a restricted glimpse of a domestic interior, progressively filled with more and more possessions. The procedure by which this is accomplished is photographic and, appropriately, a tension is mounted between the substantiality of the crate and the imagistic status of the crate's interior, two views of materiality. In *Sounding/Arc*, Ineke Standish linked the conventional version of moving with something more mythic, a departure to a place where nomadism involves a curious combination of the high tech (her

industrial metal box) with the low tech (wooden poles with which to carry the box).

Andrew Forster's *Trio* presented a chair/listening podium. By climbing onto the chair, the viewer could don a set of earphones hanging overhead. An extended back gave the chair the aspect of a lecture podium. While the hanging headphones suggested ominous possibilities, the music they supplied was quite otherwise; a jazz standard from the forties or fifties sung presumably by Forster himself, and with "sincerity." To "view" this work one may stand on the chair to hear what the headphones have to offer,





*Sounding/Arc*, Ineke Standish, 1999.

and this puts the viewer "on display" and in a position of vulnerability. That is, the positions of viewer and artwork have been rotated, raising the question as to who and where the artist is now, a question of the "trio." This perception is reinforced by song lyrics that make frequent use of personal pronouns and repetitions of the phrase "like my heart and me dedicated to you." A curious combination of concerns, the personal (trust, sincerity) juxtaposed with a theory of conflicted authorship (who is speaking, can we say what we mean, etc).

Strangely enough, amongst all the works (which I assume from their dates were built specifically for this site) one stands out for having been built several years previously, and for a "conventional" exhibition space. What is so curious about 1(900)999-6969, a work of Ian Carr-Harris' built in 1991, is that, as an already existing work, it was selected to be removed from storage to be placed on exhibition but in another storage site, so

even though the work has been re-moved for exhibition, it remains in storage. By the logic of the readymade, this displacement from storage to exhibition-as-storage makes the work site-reflexive in a way that the other works built specifically for this occasion cannot be. They are works made for this exhibition while Carr-Harris' piece, as a work already built and previously exhibited, uses its literal status as a work in storage to reflect its theatricalization by virtue of its current display within the exhibition. A site-reflexive sculpture, this work makes evident the displacements that occur within the rhetoric of exhibition.

The conceptualization of the "Moving and Storage" site corresponds to interesting questions about the institution of art and art's institutions. If the site has been chosen for its everydayness (its presumed lack of art specialization), the paradoxes of exhibiting art as non-art or non-art as art have been assumed by this exhibition, leaving the question of art's "outside"

unanswered (except for 1(900)999-6969). "Moving and Storage" does not rest on the simple question of available space for exhibiting but rather with the desire to site works within a space already occupied by non-art activity. Pursuing these concerns requires accounting for the paradoxical autonomy of artworks, which allows for their ambiguous independence from site, their measurable materiality as stuff to be shipped, stored, bought and sold, and their pluralities of meaning. "Moving and Storage" sought to collapse the boundary between art and everyday life. This formulation risks abjuring the autonomy question if pursued naively, simply substituting consumer entertainment and the market for those practices of resistance and freedom that are usually called art and on which, it might be argued, rests its value.

*Stephen Horne is an artist and writer living in Montreal. His writing appears regularly in publications such as Parachute, Artpress and Canadian Art.*

# WHEN THERE IS NO LIMIT TO SPIRIT

## Tall Orders: On the Spiritual in Art

DAVID ABECASSIS, STEVE ARMSTRONG, MATTHEW CARVER, SUSAN DOBSON, ELIZABETH FEARON, YACHEL GAGNON, JENNIFER LINTON, CAROLYN LIVINGSTON, IRENE LUXBACHER, JONATHAN SHEINBAUM, PEARL VAN GEEST, ANNA YESHUK

CURATED BY GARY MICHAEL DAULT

PROPELLER CENTRE FOR THE VISUAL ARTS, TORONTO, DECEMBER 8, 1998–JANUARY 9, 1999

REVIEW BY ROZENA MAART

The Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts recently hosted "Tall Orders: On the Spiritual in Art," a notable exhibition at once profoundly Canadian and particularly feminist. Twelve artists, four men and eight women, have produced a comprehensive inventory on the subject of the spiritual. The exhibit marks connections between and among space, the body, the mind and its relationship to histories of diaspora. It attempts to understand geographical space as lived space in very remarkable and particular ways.

When curator Gary Michael Dault spoke about the exhibit in a panel discussion, I found it perplexing that the artists whose work was represented remained silent. There was no discussion or engagement; no counter-arguments provided and none provoked. Such overwhelming silence appeared odd and disturbing: artists were present when their work was being pointed at and scrutinized. They looked on as though performing a protocol of curatorial etiquette.

Determined that my review would not further such absence of speech, I sought out each of the artists. My purpose in speaking with them and in writing this review is to engage with the artists and their work and to facilitate discussion.

1. Yachel Gagnon's wooden sculpture exerts an immediate visual grip. The carving suggests a desire to seek out, to demarcate space. We are drawn into the wood, into nature, into the spirit of the

wood. Hung vertically, this sculpture expresses that tall order of life and existence through which the spirit seeks representation.

2. Elizabeth Fearon's delightful piece, *Snow Angels*, speaks to the spirit of the child within us. In this short video, a young child lies, bird-like, flapping her wings as she performs an imaginary flight. Black birds circle the blue sky, casting glances toward the figure of the child imitating the process of flight. The child, I realized, was in fact the artist herself. Clothed in winter garments, sturdy black shoes, black trousers, a woollen cap and jacket, this figure embodied a spirit in flight, a spirit removed from the everyday world of scuffle in which her physical body lies immersed.

3. Six small, square *Breath Studies* drew my attention next. Here, placed beside each other, were six boards upon which colour was spread. Irene Luxbacher created this study by breathing onto their surfaces. Titled according to their colours: *Red, Blue, Gold, Green, Yellow and Orange*, each colour had had life breathed into it and was thus represented. Colour visualized as breath, as that which is penetrated by breath, spirit visualized as colour: all this was expressed in each exhalation.

4. In Carolyn Livingston's *Under the sway of thy gentle wings*, two bodies lie side by side; their gaze fixed, their gestures in perpetual harmony. Particularly pleasing was the way in which the artist linked the

colour of their flesh with the colour of the earth in which both bodies lie. Swept along by undercurrents of desire, longing and yearning, I was drawn into their passionate, unbroken gaze. The spirit that Livingston depicts here connects to the earth; a spirit that expresses itself through gestures.

5. Anna Yeshuk's *Immemorial Recollected* is thematically divided between mothering and the emergence of the independent child. The image that I saw as a womb because of its juxtaposition with an image of a joyous child was in fact, a Rorschach ink blot. In conversation, Yeshuk explained to me, "The Rorschach test is supposed to stimulate the imagination. As I found myself looking at it, daydreaming, I began thinking about my past and the present." Yeshuk then talked about her Ukrainian heritage. Now, looking at the blotting, I could envisage her crossing oceans, landscapes and extracting memories of her evolution as a child, her experiences in the Ukraine, and her place within Canada. I became acutely aware of how memories nurtured the self projected here. Not only are the images, their relationship to the imagination, and to geographical space and the space of the female body pertinent to how this work functions, they also trace memories of historical and ancestral pasts and their re-presentation in Canada.

6. I felt the urge to kneel down and gaze into Matthew Carver's cylindrical metal fire extinguisher. My eyes surveyed the





St. Agatha's Vision of God as a Surgeon, Jennifer Linton, 1998, coloured pencil and gouache on mylar.  
Courtesy of the artist and Propeller Centre for the Arts.

gallery space in case I had missed something. "Use on Class A Fires," the caption read. The work evoked the notion of spirit as a fire that could not be extinguished. Spirit is present here because the painted flames that surround the canister are kept alive by representation: spirit will seek representation in any form that warrants its presence.

7. Pearl Van Geest's four plastered boards document the process of healing. Their white, pasty texture urged a tactile response, much like when one traces trickles of blood with a forefinger whose fleshy navigation soothes the pain. In

each of the four depictions, a black airplane hovered like a black cross. The white plaster was spread softly, like butter, like a motion that sought to soothe a pain. These spirited works speak to those who heal and renew their energies in the face of adversity, and do so triumphantly.

8. Jonathan Sheinbaum's hanging spiral read: "You are Here." I gazed at the two components that form this work: the top segment was a topographical map of Toronto. Beneath it was a photograph of the very floor on which I was standing. With dust particles clearly visible, the

work had a sense of lived-in-ness: a moment where placement, location and Being merge.

I asked Sheinbaum whether geography was important to him. "Well, I wonder about the 'Wandering Jew' image and whether I am actually evoking this.... I do know that I carry a sense of places I have lived in with me," he replied. I told him that, for me, the title of his work drew attention to the gallery space, the very exhibit I was attending, and the overwhelming absence of people of colour. We agreed that as two people who have each lived in more than one place, this informs our work. When a work focuses with precise detail on topography, the viewer is compelled to consider questions of permanence and transience: whether we flee, search or nest.

9. Steve Armstrong's two paintings, *The Descent of Geometry* and *Smithson's Planet*, were shrouded in darkness. I thought of Descartes and Husserl: both mathematicians, the former a Jesuit who studied philosophy and mathematics and the latter a Jew who studied geometry and whose name defines the very foundations of phenomenology. I waited for the appropriate moment to ask Steve Armstrong about the influences he draws on.

"I may have been thinking about Husserl," Armstrong replied. "but the things I find most urgent are God, epistemology and art. *The Descent of Geometry* comes from those thoughts." Here, again, was an artist whose thoughts and reflections ventured into the area of "God" with two works that celebrated the evolution of the earth, religion, mathematics and a sense of spirit that evolved as a consequence of these relationships.

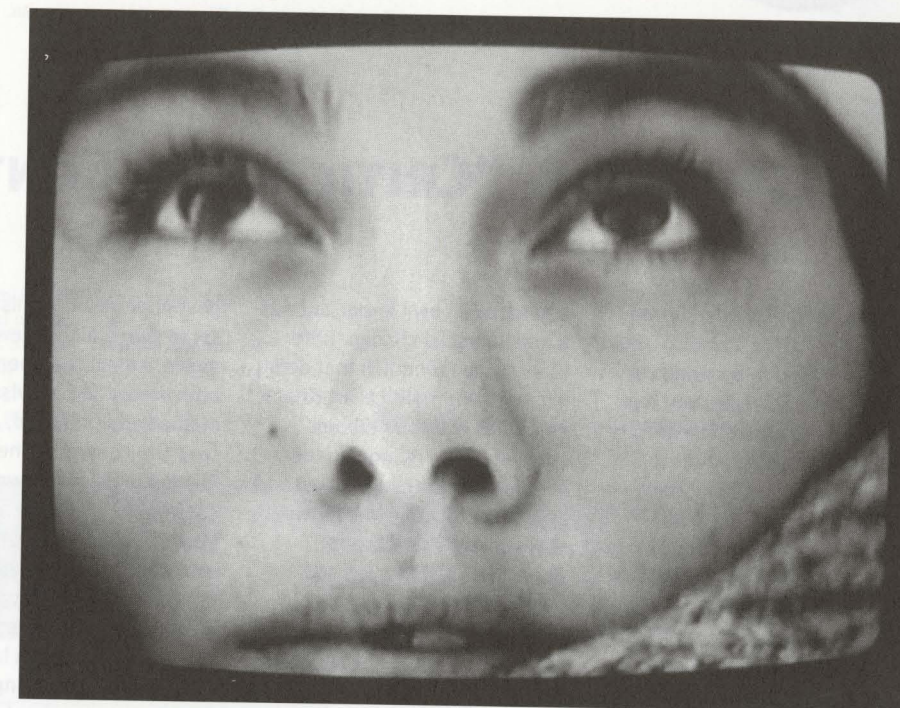
10. Susan Dobson's *After Image* employs an interesting method. She explains:

"I stare at the black space, then the white space, then the after-image... almost like a displacement having to find the image." I was interested in this process and how the two pieces exhibited, the white square placed on a grey background and the grey square on the white background, functioned to exclude blackness.

The absence of blackness provoked questions for me about how spirit is represented when *After Image* is performed. Is it a grey spirit that emanates when blackness is scrutinized with such intensity? I thought of the apartheid years in South Africa when I was living in the Observatory, an area that unofficially became known as a "grey area," since Black and white students now filled the previously white-only university neighbourhood. What I found so compelling about Dobson's depiction of spirit was how it made room for a continuity of colour that does not end with strict borders but whose continuum stretches within the minds of those thoughtful enough to engage it.

11. David Abecassis' green/blue light drew my attention. *Hope* was its title and it hung there in all its geometric glory: a signifier of spirit. Thoughts of Moses speaking to God at the burning bush, thoughts of an underground railroad and light being carried either in the form of torches or lanterns came rushing to me.

I spoke to Abecassis about the Frederick Douglass image, the underground railroad and the Moses image. He was pleased that I had thought of both anti-slavery and such a profoundly Jewish experience and associated this light with it: "This light is hope, but I also know that light is not always about hope, it has also been used to scare people, to instill fear. I wanted this light to represent the spirit with a small 's', devoid of a



Snow Angels, Elizabeth Fearon, 1998, video, 2 min.  
Still courtesy of the artist and Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts.

social construct, but I am also very, very much aware of socially constructed fear... and by this I mean, in particular, some of the events surrounding the Holocaust." Abecassis had here created a work that depicts spirit by the symbolism of light—spirit as the light that marks our defiance, resistance and survival.

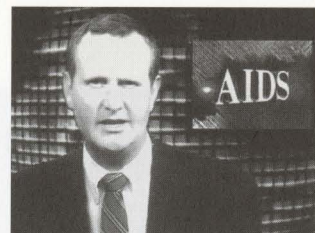
12. A surgeon's knife lies outside of the frame of *St. Agatha's Vision of God as a Surgeon*, by Jennifer Linton. A body lies still beneath it. It is precisely the body that is the point of departure for examining the spirit in this work. The artist told me how during the third century the Roman senator Quintianus had ordered Agatha's breasts removed after she rejected him. Here, God is cast as a surgeon who gave Agatha her breasts back. This work taps the fears many women have of violation and bodily disfigurement, and St. Agatha is presented as an

example of a woman whose spirit overcame violence.

Although curator Gary Michael Dault asserted adamantly that he chose pieces of work for this exhibit that did not make statements about religion, all of the works here clearly use religious symbolism to depict notions of spirit. From *Snow Angels*, to breath and life as spirit, to notions of geometry, flesh, fire, blood, violence and healing, spirit is depicted in "Tall Orders: On the Spirit in Art" in powerful and reverberating ways.

Rozena Maart writes both fiction and non-fiction and works in the areas of Black consciousness, psychoanalysis and deconstruction. She took her doctoral degree at the Center for Cultural Studies, Birmingham UK, where she worked on the relationship between consciousness and politics in language. Winner of The Journey Prize: Best Short Fiction in Canada (1992) she currently teaches part-time at the University of Guelph.





Gregg Bordowitz, *Fast Trip, Long Drop*, 1993, 54 min.  
Stills courtesy of the artist.



## "POLITICAL" & "CRITICAL" IN CONTEMPORARY ART

by Tom Folland

In Gary Kibbins' article "Bored Bedmates" (FUSE 22, no. 2), he discusses a video by Montreal artists Donald Goodes and A.M. Léger, *How to Make Contemporary Art* (1996), that lampoons the earnest conceits of contemporary art dealing with social topics. The video, in short, makes a mockery of the whole postmodern project of socially engaged art with a few coffee beans and some photos from *National Geographic*.

More precisely, in Kibbins' view, Goodes and Léger's videotape was a "twisted reflection of the prevailing, troubled conditions of politicized art practices." But the videotape, Kibbins goes on to argue, pertains not so much to political art, but to "critical" art, anodyne cultural practices that may have the signifiers of radical politics—images of the Third World, say, or subaltern subjectivity—but are not truly political in that they do not embody the characteristics of political art.

While I found Kibbins' thoughtful differentiation between critical and political art extremely useful and enlightening, I was not convinced by his remaining discussion, which seemed to skirt a central question implicitly raised in his text: what contemporary art work has been able to reinvent the political in a meaningful way?

More radical, and perhaps more disquieting, is the concept that art may well have over-

estimated its own importance as a tool for social change. Unfortunately, to relinquish that defining feature of political art (that it embodies action as Kibbins suggests) is to relinquish the separation between political and critical art, the fine line between, say, a work by Condé and Beveridge, and Goodes and Léger's video *How to Make Contemporary Art*. But then, that video is a one-liner. Lacking any real complexity, it pokes fun only at art in bad faith or art that is disingenuous.

What about confronting the possibility that political art may have indeed overestimated itself and that the categories of political art—its public character, its notion of agency, its proscriptive directives—are in dire need of overhaul? There is another video work by an artist that addresses this very problem. Not from a cynical or disingenuous position, however, but from the point of view of an artist whose work has been invested in the very project of postmodern politics of representation and the ideas of art as social agency.

*Fast Trip, Long Drop*, made by Gregg Bordowitz in 1993, provides a remarkably personal account of the artist's life with AIDS, aspects of his Jewish heritage and his involvement with the AIDS activist group ACT UP in New York. Bordowitz's previous work, as an artist and as an activist, was invested in many of the critical ideas of

postmodernism. In this video, set to very plaintive Jewish folk music, a disillusionment with both theory and activism is both marked and profound. *Fast Trip, Long Drop* begins in the typical fashion of its genre: we are confronted with what appears to be appropriated footage of a newscaster discussing AIDS. The image suddenly disappears, however, while the camera slowly pans around a large television, visually warping it, and we see the recumbent artist on his bed smoking a cigarette. From here, *Fast Trip, Long Drop* employs a range of cinematic devices that shift between narrative structures and subject positions. In many ways this work undoes the politics of Bordowitz's earlier work and replaces it with a work that is a profound questioning of the very idea of art as a form of social action.

In an ironic way, it was the AIDS crisis that put postmodernism as a theory about the social constructedness of reality to its ultimate test and revealed the limitations of art. If postmodern art's goal was the transformation of society in alliance with community and activist groups, we can only conclude, at this historical juncture, that it has surely failed. This is not to say that those alliances have not been enriching and that they have not led to a continuing evaluation and exploration of art's relationship to life. They

most surely have. In truly historical fashion, the contemporary relationship to theory and activism expressed by contemporary art recognizes changing historical conditions. Discussing his recent work in this particular context, Bordowitz stated:

I adopted a set of aesthetic principles to which I was, until recently, committed: reduce the category of beauty to efficacy, the category of form to function, the category of audience to community. Today I'm sitting here writing myself out of the categories I reduced myself to.

*Fast Trip, Long Drop* achieves what *How To Make Contemporary Art* cannot: a genuine and, ironically, political critique of the political in art. What I found unconvincing about Kibbins' analysis was his reluctance to address the failure of a particular model of political art. The most progressive and truly political artwork being done today, I would argue, addresses, without idealization and received ideas, these limitations and failures.

Gregg Bordowitz's film script is published in *Uncontrollable Bodies: Testimonies of Identity and Culture*, eds. Rodney Sappington and Tyler Stallings (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994).

## Sudbury

### Where Life On Earth Began

Sudbury geographically sits on the remains of an immense meteorite that struck the planet more than 2 billion years ago. This meteoroid was the spark that ignited the primordial ooze. Sudbury is where life on earth began.

Paul Lamothe, 2000

Edwin (Buzz) Aldrin, (left) an Apollo 11 astronaut, was the first human to be photographed on the moon.

Grace Hartman, (centre) was Sudbury's first female mayor. She met Buzz briefly during his training here in Sudbury for that famous first lunar landing.

Traci Lords, (right) a former porn star, is now a successful television and recording artist.

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# Where Life On Earth Began



## Sudbury

See the review of Paul Lamoth's postcard project on page 39 of this issue.  
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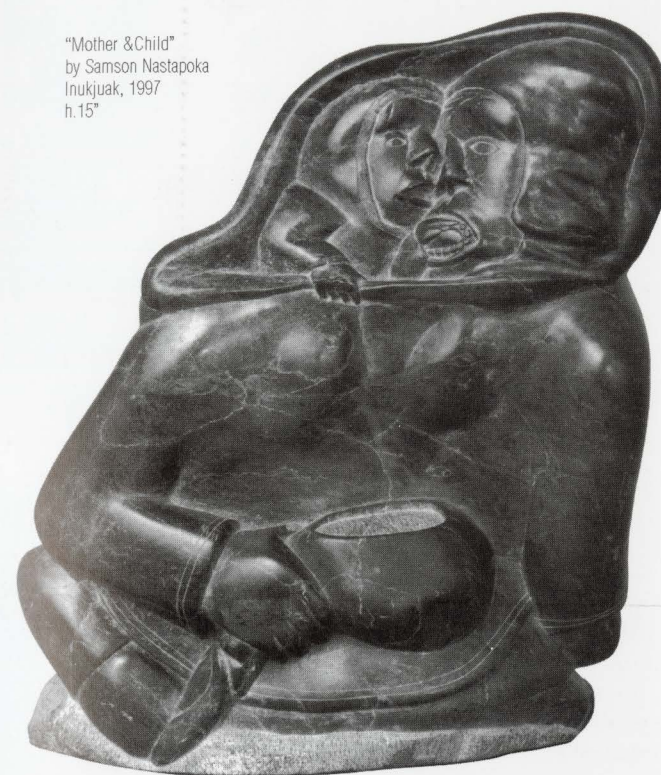
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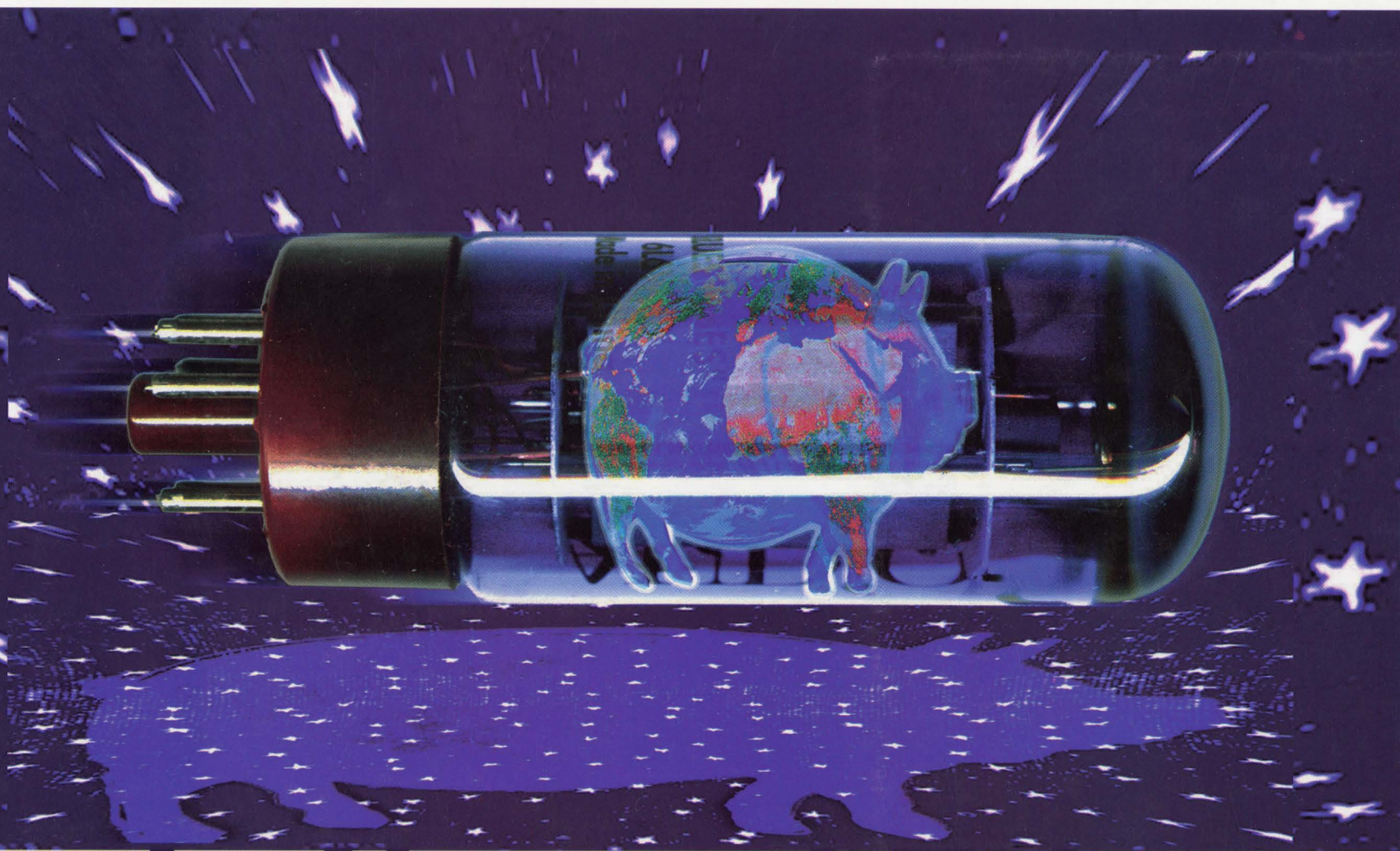
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